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OF  
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY  
BEFORE AND AFTER ROUSSEAU

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STUDIES IN THE HISTORY  
OF  
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY  
BEFORE AND AFTER ROUSSEAU

BY

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VOLUME II

FROM BURKE TO MAZZINI

WITH A LIST

OF THE WRITINGS OF PROFESSOR VAUGHAN

BY

H. B. CHARLTON, M.A.

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS

1939

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## A LIST OF THE WRITINGS OF PROFESSOR CHARLES EDWYN VAUGHAN

By H. B. CHARLTON

(Reprinted from the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. vii.,  
No. 3, August 1923.)

A LIST of Vaughan's writings is a very inadequate tribute to his memory; for he was greater than they. As the bulkiest of them are scholarly contributions to learning, they do, of course, reveal the quality of his mind; but they provide only hints of the other elements so richly mixed in him. His shorter and less formal writings, however, give fuller play to more temperamental features. And so in a way, the natural bent and the full-grown manner of the man may be discerned in a survey of the scholar's books. There is the rhetorical sweep, the broadest generalisation, the widest denunciation: but there is, too, the habitual scruple in the act of judgement, which came to him as much from instinctive honesty as from critical training. There is the passion for the speculative ideal; but it is disciplined by a fervid awareness of brave sublunary things. There is the underlying sense of rigid justice; but it is tempered by an overflowing stream of human kindness. And neither side of these potentially conflicting attributes is more Vaughan than the other.

His qualities gained by their complements. His rhetoric never dazzled his intelligence: rather, it illumined remoter regions for further intellectual exploration. The high, dry light of reason was in its turn filtered through those warmer tones, without which it distorts the natural object as does a flash-light portrait. But whilst others more competent must assess the gain to Vaughan's thought from the many-sided humanity of the thinker, the lay philosopher can at least discern the fitness in his finding his most satisfying occupation with political theories. For in no other domain do interests which are abstract and concrete, speculative and practical at once, approach more closely to each other. Nor,

surely, is there a speculative field in which the seizing of ultimate truths is more conditioned by grasp of human motive: and in such a venture, Vaughan went twice-armed, for the intuitive revelations which came from his spontaneous sympathies were sharpened and intensified by a life-long intimacy with the noblest poets of Europe's greater ages.

Yet at this time, it is impossible to think of Vaughan as just the thinker or the author. It is the impression of the man which persists. The picture may be the same, but it is ampler, allowing us more easily and frequently to catch the diverse characteristics of which he was compounded. He was transparent, yet elusive; ascetic, yet hearty; austere, yet benevolent; unassuming as a child, yet impressive as a patriarch; so manifestly extraordinary, yet so palpably normal; in a word, as various as are the colours of the rainbow, but like them, too, except at momentary glimpses, harmoniously blended in one familiar air. The shy grace of bearing and the inviting benignity of demeanour, with which he charmed the smaller circle of his acquaintance, would in a flash be passionately transfigured to an arresting solemnity of gesture and to a consuming blaze of rapture or of wrath, which were the spell of his wider influence. The simple modesty, which caused him at all times to say nothing of himself, would at moments glow to incandescence through a casual phrase, which thus unconsciously said everything. The voice, usually slow, subdued and deliberate, would on occasion become strepitant with enthusiasm or strident with fury. The placid composure of hours spent largely in solitary retirement moved without strain to the easy sociability of a moorland tramp, to the genial conviviality of an intimate dinner-party, and to the eager exhilaration of a fight for things worth fighting for. If at the end, one must, then, think of Vaughan as a recluse, the impression must be corrected by remembering that his last hermitage was pitched within the bustle of a crowded city.

It is the continual need for modifications of this sort which makes one realise the hopelessness of attempting to put Vaughan's features on to paper. One sketches a posture, and sees at once, that, pencilled lamely so, it hides more than it reveals of the figure of the man; for each trait was distinguished by singular complements. Celt and Saxon came together in him, not in casual contiguity, but struck into one personality by natural alchemy. His humanity was the active philanthropy of mind and hand, which is more human and not less charitable, when it resents inhumanity and sentimental humanitarianism alike. His humanism, similarly, was not a traditional system and a dogma, but a motive force and a point of view. His scholarship was classical in the oldest and best sense; but it was the wisdom of the ancient

world brought to the needs of the present. Hence, in his professional capacity, from a classical form-master, he became a professor of English literature: and in his private predilection, his province was the mind of Europe during the last two centuries. There was an air of sanctity about the zeal with which Vaughan devoted his life to these studies: and the impression was confirmed by seeing their domination so frequently suspended, or rather sacrificed, at the bidding of more compelling sanctions. For his ideal of service was rooted in a system of the ultimate nature of things. But it was freshly realised from day to day in tireless devotion to the immediate task of the moment; its hall-mark was its minute susceptibility in detecting the calls of duty when none but the finest ears could catch a sound. Such exacting loyalty as this may have limited the scope of his activities: it took from him, for instance, the time needful to make many books. But it gave unmeasurable value to his influence over those whom accident brought within its range: it made him, for instance, a teacher, the like of whom one will not easily meet again.

Nor, perhaps, is it unjust to think of Vaughan as realising himself most completely as a teacher, and most of all, as a teacher of English literature in a modern University. There the range of his endowments had fullest scope. Every occasion found him its ideal minister: the casual friendly chat with a pupil in difficulties; the breezy seriousness of a small study circle; the thrill of a lecture to a larger class—rhapsodies on Parnassus, as we, his pupils, used to call them. They were lectures as incapable of description as of imitation. They were extempore, and passed imperceptibly from sudden question shot at front row and at back row, through penetrating analysis and summary apophthegm, to passages of sustained eloquence of a temper all his own. They compelled keen thinking, and they thrilled with inspiring enthusiasm. At times the gesture might appear a mannerism, and the attitude theatrical: but that can hardly be its name, for it came spontaneously, and was never reproduced. Even the traditional witticisms were not the stock jokes of the University tradesmen, but shafts winged at the moment as some modern instance of an ancient saw was suddenly perceived. What wonder that his pupils loved him? and loved, rather than worshipped, is the better word; it gives the right sense of mingled reverence and admiration, and avoids the implication of remote aloofness in their object. For Vaughan never sat above, wrapped in academic splendour, exhaling clouds of higher mysteries which hide the summits from the view; he strode on ahead, guide and vigorous partner, in a bracing venture up the mountain side.

Obviously, a lively expedition of this sort has lost much of its

vital thrill when it has become mere words on a printed page. That is why Vaughan's books are only a part of the man. He did not write easily. Even in a physical sense, the pen moved slowly and laboriously; the script had a quaint distinction which suggested the coming together of Greek and Teutonic, without an intervening Italic. He composed much more freely on the rostrum, warmed by the sympathetic stimulus of an audience. His style was essentially oratorical. Many of the items recorded below are, in fact, reports of addresses, printed, too, not infrequently, in the exact form in which they were extemporarily shaped. Literary composition of the regular sort was less congenial to him. Pen in hand, he was retarded by a meticulous sense of form, how exquisite, those of us who have submitted writings to him well know. He was even more impeded by his rigorous standard of historic exactitude and of personal honesty; on one occasion, he read again some eight volumes of a French philosopher, to find conviction for retaining a rather depreciatory epithet which he had provisionally attached to that author's writings.

Yet, despite all this, Vaughan's literary works are in themselves a great achievement. In the mass, they fall into a striking unity, and, piece by piece, they represent a remarkable continuity of interest. Whether in the way of prefatory paragraph, magazine article, school-edition, casual lecture or lengthy treatise, whether nominally on politics, poetry, drama or novel, their concern is with the attempt of the better minds to illustrate and to probe the problems of corporate life in the modern world. They lead naturally to the *magnum opus*, the Political Writings of Rousseau, the product, literally, of a lifetime. Of the material which went to its making Vaughan wrote in 1895, that it was brought "nearly to completion"; in 1901, he reported it as in "the last stage of completion," adding that he hoped to send it to the press within twelve months. In effect, it was to occupy him continuously for another fourteen years, until at length a part of it was given to the world in the two large volumes issued by the Cambridge Press in 1915.

In the face of such an output, a foregoing remark that Vaughan's writings are an inadequate representation of the man, may well seem absurd. It was inspired by the feeling that books are, after all, relatively dead things, relatively, that is, to the living personality of the author, when that author is such a man as was Vaughan. And if further extenuation be needed, let it be that the writer of these lines was a pupil of Vaughan's, and is still under the spell of his presence.

(Titles recorded in the following list have been exactly transcribed, except in the matter of the form of the author's name and the titular descriptions attached thereto. For this, a uniform phrase has been adopted, "by C. E. V. . . ." Attention is drawn to such of the articles as are unsigned or signed pseudonymously.)

## A. INDEPENDENT WORKS, EDITIONS, AND TRANSLATIONS

1. SELECTIONS FROM BURKE'S REFLECTIONS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. (Edited.) With Introduction and Notes by C. E. V. . . . *Rivingtons*, 1892 (*reprinted* 1893 and 1906).

The editorial matter consists of an *Introduction*, pp. vii-xiv, *Analysis*, pp. xv-xvi, and *Notes*, pp. 125-144.

2. BURKE'S SPEECHES ON AMERICA. (Edited.) With Introduction and Notes by C. E. V. . . . *Rivingtons*, 1893 (*reprinted* in 1898, 1904, 1907, 1914).

The editorial matter consists of an *Introduction*, pp. vii-xx, *Analysis*, pp. xxi-xxii, and *Notes*, pp. 121-154. C. E. V. acted as general editor to the series of which No. 1 and No. 2 are a part. This and the foregoing item, although professedly for use in schools, have a substantive value in themselves, and are steps on the way to the author's Rousseau: even the Notes are not infrequently succinct paragraphs of his political scholarship. Vaughan had been schoolmaster at Clifton from 1878 to 1888, and then for a very short time at Rugby. He felt very keenly the need for such radical alterations in the curriculum of secondary and public schools as would make the modern world, its history, languages, and literature, their main occupation on the Arts side. In a lengthy paper, still in MS., and written about 1919, he draws up a very serious indictment against the traditional classical education, all the more telling when we remember that he took a First in Classical Moderations (1874), a First in Litterae Humaniores (1877), was twice bracketed Jenkyns Exhibitioner (1876, 1877), and then taught Classics for ten years.

3. THE DUCHESS OF MALFI. A Play written by John Webster. Edited with a Preface, Notes and Glossary by C. E. V. . . . *Dent* (Temple Dramatists), 1896 (*reprinted* 1900, 1907, 1913, 1919).

The *Preface* occupies pp. v-xv, and throws new light on the source of the play.

4. ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM. With an Introduction by C. E. V. . . . *Blackie & Son*, 1896. (This is a volume in the series, the Warwick Library of English Literature, of which C. H. Herford was general editor.) Pp. cii, 219 (*reprinted* 1901, 1903, 1905, 1911, 1912).

Pp. ix-cii are an introductory essay on the development of English Literary Criticism. Pp. 1-219 reprint briefly annotated texts from Sidney, Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, Shelley, Carlyle and Pater.

5. AREOPAGITICA AND OTHER TRACTS. By John Milton. (Edited by C. E. V. . . .) *Dent* (Temple Classics), 1900 (*reprinted* 1907).

Besides the *Areopagitica*, this contains the *Letter on Education*, and *Autobiographical Extracts* from four other tracts. The editorial matter consists of *Notes*, pp. 135-147, an introductory note to the *Letter*, pp. 70-71, and a longer

one to the *Areopagitica*, pp. 148-155. One of Vaughan's most impressive lectures to his pupils at Leeds was on the *Areopagitica* and Taylor's *Liberty of Prophecy* as documents in the history of political and religious toleration.

6. THE ROMANTIC REVOLT. By C. E. V. . . . *Blackwood & Sons*, 1907 (reprinted 1923). (This is a volume in the series, Epochs of European Literature, of which G. Saintsbury was general editor.) Pp. vii and 507.

This is a very characteristic survey of European literature from the death of Rousseau and of Voltaire in 1778 to the death of Schiller in 1805. Except for what concerns Russian, it was based throughout on original sources, and is particularly noteworthy for the German section.

7. TYPES OF TRAGIC DRAMA. By C. E. V. . . . *Macmillan*, 1908. Pp. viii and 275.

A reproduction, more or less faithful, of a course of lectures on Tragedy from Aeschylus to Ibsen, delivered to a general audience in the Leeds University during the winter of 1906. Each lecture was written out within a week after delivery. The volume is probably the best illustration of the critical method and the expository manner of Vaughan as a teacher of literature.

8. THE POLITICAL WRITINGS OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU. Edited from the original manuscripts and authentic editions. With Introductions and Notes. By C. E. V. . . . *Cambridge University Press*, 1915. 2 vols. Pp. xxii, 516 and viii, 578.

The following details will indicate the extent of Vaughan's own writing in the two volumes. Besides a general introductory essay on *Rousseau as a Political Philosopher* (vol. 1, pp. 1-117), each separate work contained in the collection has an introduction and a full critical apparatus of its own. Thus in vol. 1, the introduction to the *Discours sur l'inégalité* consists of pp. 118-123: that to *L'économie politique*, pp. 228-236: that to *L'état de guerre*, pp. 281-292: that to *La paix perpétuelle*, pp. 359-363: that to *Diderot's Droit naturel*, pp. 423-428: and that to the *First Draft* of the *Contrat Social*, pp. 434-445. In vol. 2, the introduction to the *Final Draft* of the *Contrat Social* occupies pp. 1-20: that to the *Passages illustrating the Contrat*, pp. 137-142: that to the *Lettres de la Montagne*, pp. 173-196: that to the *Projet . . . de la Corse*, pp. 292-305: that to the *Considerations sur . . . Pologne*, pp. 369-409: then follows an *Epilogue*, pp. 517-526, whilst an *Appendix II* reprints a large part of a previously published lecture, *Rousseau and his Enemies*, which is recorded below (No. 11).

9. A LASTING PEACE THROUGH THE FEDERATION OF EUROPE, AND THE STATE OF WAR, BY JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU. Translated by C. E. V. . . . *Constable*, 1917. Pp. 128.

This translation of Rousseau's two treatises has an *Introduction*, pp. 5-35, written in the early summer of 1916, pointing out the bearing of Rousseau's thought on the state of Europe in that year.

10. DU CONTRAT SOCIAL, OU PRINCIPES DU DROIT POLITIQUE: JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU. Edited by C. E. V. . . . *Manchester University Press*, 1918.

Of the editorial matter, the *Introduction* occupies pp. xi-lxxvi, and the *Notes* and an *Appendix*, pp. 125-178.



## B. INDEPENDENT ARTICLES, PUBLISHED SEPARATELY OR IN COLLABORATED VOLUMES

### I. Published separately :—

11. **ROUSSEAU AND HIS ENEMIES.** Being the substance of a Lecture delivered before the Philosophical and Literary Society of Leeds on February 7, 1911. *R. Jackson, Leeds, n.d. (1911).* Pp. 32.

A large part of this is reprinted as an Appendix to Vol. 2 of *Rousseau's Political Writings* (No. 8 above). It exposes the worthlessness of Diderot's and Grimm's evidence against Rousseau's character. A preliminary note by C. E. V. allows us to see a congenial way in which he made his books: "I desire to express my sincere thanks to the President and Council of the Society, for having kindly secured the services of a highly skilled Reporter on this occasion."

12. **THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH POETRY UPON THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL ON THE CONTINENT.** By C. E. V. . . . British Academy Warton Lecture IV. *Oxford University Press, 1914.* Pp. 18.

This is reprinted from the Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. vi., *Oxford Press, 1914.* The Lecture was delivered before the Academy on October 29, 1913, and, as was his custom, was given without notes of any sort.

13. **BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF SWINBURNE, MORRIS AND ROSSETTI.** By C. E. V. . . . English Association Pamphlet, No. 29, December 1914. Pp. 12.

Vaughan served on the General Committee of the English Association, was President of the Yorkshire Branch of it (1908-1911), and frequently lectured to other northern branches. Reports, longer and shorter, of some of these lectures will be found in the Bulletin of the English Association as under:

No. 8, June 1909, p. 4, "English Prose Literature and its place in Teaching," a lecture given at Leeds, March 9, 1909.

No. 10, Feb. 1910, p. 40, "Recent Views of Shakespeare," a lecture given at Newcastle, Oct. 15, 1909.

No. 16, Feb. 1912, p. 30, "Wordsworth and the French Revolution," a lecture given at Newcastle, Oct. 27, 1911.

No. 23, June 1914, p. 29, "The Edinburgh Review and its Victims," a lecture given at Manchester, March 6, 1914.

No. 33, Dec. 1917, p. 17, "The Debt of England to France," a lecture given at Manchester, Oct. 19, 1917.

He also lectured at Manchester under the same auspices April 26, 1912, on Elizabethan Drama and Foreign Politics, but apparently no report was sent to the Bulletin.

14. **GIAMBATTISTA VICO: AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PIONEER.** By C. E. V. . . . *Manchester University Press, for the John Rylands Library, 1921.* Pp. 22.

This is a reprint, from the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1921, of a lecture delivered at the Library on March 9, 1921. C. E. V. was a Governor of the Library from 1915 to his death.

### II. Contributed to collaborated volumes :—

15. *To "The British Quarterly Review," Hodder & Stoughton :*  
Vol. 77, January 1883, pp. 71-97: **VICTOR HUGO**, by C. E. V. . . .  
Vol. 80, July 1884, pp. 1-27: **MR. BROWNING**, by C. E. V. . . .

These articles may easily escape attention, since, although they are signed, they

have curiously slipped from the Index appended to the *Review*, and are consequently omitted from the list of authors in Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature*. Other of Vaughan's writings on Browning are noted below. The Hugo article follows the main motives of his work as dramatist, poet, novelist and public man. Hugo was one of Vaughan's earliest idols and one of his lasting passions. As a school-boy, he had addressed a letter of homage to him, and set great store on the reply it brought. And one of the present writer's last memories of Vaughan is of his declaiming one of the political hymns to the Derbyshire hills.

16. *To "The Dictionary of National Biography" :—*

Vol. 58, 1899. CHARLES JOHN VAUGHAN (1816-97), by C. E. V. . . .

This is a three-column life of his uncle, who was Headmaster of Harrow, Master of the Temple, and Dean of Llandaff.

17. *To "The Cambridge Modern History" :—*

Vol. VI., 1909. Chap. xxiv. THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE, by C. E. V. . . . Pp. 822-837.

18. *To "The Cambridge History of English Literature" :—*

Vol. VI., 1910. Chap. vi. TOURNEUR AND WEBSTER, by C. E. V. . . . Pp. 166-187.

Vol. X., 1913. Chap. iii. STERNE AND THE NOVEL OF HIS TIMES, by C. E. V. . . . Pp. 46-66.

Vol. XI., 1914. Chap. vi. COLERIDGE, by C. E. V. . . . Pp. 117-139.

19. *To "Essays and Studies" by Members of the English Association, Oxford Press :—*

Vol. I., 1910, pp. 168-196. CARLYLE AND HIS GERMAN MASTERS, by C. E. V. . . .

20. *To "Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society," Byles & Sons, Bradford :—*

Vol. II. Pt. 12, January 1911, pp. 20-38, ECHOES OF OLD ENGLISH RHYTHM IN MODERN ENGLISH POETRY.

This is a lecture delivered to the Society at Leeds, October 31, 1910. Its main thesis is indicated by a paragraph towards the end: "The theory which would build blank verse of feet, in any sense approaching to strictness, starts with everything in its favour: it is consistent, it is logical, it can claim historical probability; the one thing wanting to it . . . is that it does not tally with the facts."

21. *To "The Modern Language Review," Cambridge University Press :—*

Vol. 6, 1911, pp. 225-230, REVIEW, by C. E. V. . . ., of A. C. Bradley's *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*.

Vol. 11, 1916, pp. 482-496, REVIEW, by C. E. V. . . ., of G. M. Harper's *William Wordsworth: His Life, Works and Influence*.

The review of Harper's volume is one of Vaughan's most characteristic writings. He seldom reviewed books: he said it was liable to breed detestable intellectual habits. But the review in question is as much an independent article as a review.

22. *To* "Charlotte Brontë, 1816-1916: a Centenary Memorial" prepared by the Brontë Society, edited by Butler Wood, F.R.S.L., with a Foreword by Mrs. Humphry Ward. *Fisher Unwin*, 1917 (and twice reprinted in 1918): pp. 173-206, CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË: A COMPARISON AND A CONTRAST, by C. E. V. . . .

This is a skilled reporter's account of an address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Brontë Society, held at Keighley on January 20, 1912. The editor writes that it "required almost no editing." (It gives a very good impression of Vaughan's style of lecturing to a popular audience.) It had been previously printed in Brontë Society Publications, Part 22, Transactions, Vol. 4, pp. 217-235. In the copy of this in the Vaughan collection in the Library of the Leeds University are a few proof corrections in his hand.

### C. BRIEFER AND MORE FUGITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAGAZINES

23. *To* "The Marlburian" :—

Vol. VII. No. 121, Nov. 13, 1872, THOMAS DE QUINCEY, by "Volpone."

This article, which runs to two and a half pages, is certainly by Vaughan.

Vol. XXXVIII. No. 582, May 20, 1902, pp. 61-63, IN MEMORIAM : DEAN FARRAR.

Vol. XLI., No. 624, May 22, 1906, p. 60, C. M. BULL : OBITUARY NOTICE.

It is impossible to detect as his any other contribution, as they were usually either without signature or with a pseudonymous one. Major Davenport, who has generously searched the file for me, adds that in Vol. VII. No. 111, April 24, 1872, there is a two-page article, *Poetry of the Century*, which, being signed "V," may or may not be Vaughan's. He was a pupil at Marlborough from February 1867 to Midsummer 1873.

24. *To* "The Omnium" :—

No. 15, July 1878, pp. 21-22, "WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN," by "Sampon."

Nothing in this article precludes our giving it to Vaughan; but the only reason for assuming that it is his, is the discovery amongst his papers of a copy of it with many corrections in his hand. All efforts to trace the origin of *The Omnium* have failed.

25. *To* "The Oxford Magazine" :—

No. 6, February 1884, p. 62, REVIEW, by C. E. V. . . ., of Professor T. H. Green's Two Lay Sermons.

The review occupies a little more than a column, and although only signed 'V,' is known to be by C. E. V., who was T. H. Green's cousin. Vaughan was at Balliol from 1873 to 1877, leaving the University five years before *The Oxford Magazine* was founded.

26. *To* "The National Home-reading Union Magazine, Special Courses Section" :—

Vol. 2, No. 1. Oct. 1891, ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE, I. pp. 3-4.

- No. 2. Nov. 1891, ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE, II.  
pp. 18-19.
- Vol. 5, No. 1. Oct. 1893, ENGLISH LITERATURE, MODERN, INTRODUCTORY, pp. 6-8.  
No. 4. Jan. 1894, ROMOLA, I. pp. 85-86.  
No. 5. Feb. 1894, ROMOLA, II. pp. 105-109.  
No. 6. Mar. 1894, CARLYLE, LECTURES ON HEROES, pp. 128-130.
- Vol. 6. No. 1. Oct. 1894, THE ELIZABETHANS, pp. 6-8.  
No. 2. Nov. 1894, MARLOWE'S DR. FAUSTUS, pp. 31-33.  
No. 6. Mar. 1895, THE LOVE POEMS OF BROWNING, pp. 149-152.
- Vol. 7, No. 1. Oct. 1895, MILTON'S AREOPAGITICA, pp. 7-9.  
No. 9. June 1896, BURKE'S SPEECHES ON AMERICA, pp. 208-210.
- Vol. 8, No. 1. Oct. 1896, BURKE'S REFLECTIONS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, pp. 4-7.  
No. 2. Nov. 1896, BROWNING'S THE RING AND THE BOOK, pp. 36-39.  
No. 3. Dec. 1896, MARLOWE'S DR. FAUSTUS, pp. 72-73.
- Vol. 10, No. 1. Oct. 1898, ENGLISH LITERATURE TO 1688, pp. 6-8.  
No. 2. Nov. 1898, MARLOWE'S DR. FAUSTUS, pp. 31-33.  
No. 6. Mar. 1899, BROWNING'S LURIA, pp. 156-160.  
No. 9. June 1899, BROWNING'S IN A BALCONY, pp. 247-249.
- Vol. 11, No. 1. Oct. 1899, BROWNING'S KARSHISH, pp. 10-13.  
No. 6. Mar. 1900, BROWNING'S ABT VÖGLER AND A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL, pp. 156-158.
- Vol. 12, No. 4. Jan. 1901, CARLYLE'S LECTURES ON HEROES, pp. 86-88.  
No. 8. May 1901, ELIOT'S ROMOLA, pp. 199-202.
- Vol. 13, No. 6. Mar. 1902, BROWNING'S RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY, pp. 151-153.  
No. 7. April 1902, BROWNING'S THE INN ALBUM, pp. 175-178.
- Vol. 14, No. 1. Oct. 1902, MYSTERY AND MIRACLE PLAYS, pp. 34-37.  
No. 2. Nov. 1902, MARLOWE, pp. 72-74, and THE STYLE OF BROWNING'S THE RING AND THE BOOK, pp. 74-77.

All the above articles are signed. There is also in the *General Course Section* of the Magazine (issued independently of the *Special Section*) a signed article by Vaughan on 'Carlyle's Heroes' (Vol. 25, No. 2, 1913). The Union also issued a little book called 'Notes to the Pocket Volume of Selections from the Poems of Robert Browning,' by Alex. Hill . . . with 'Essays on Several Aspects of Browning's Genius,' by C. E. V., and others. Published by the *National Home-reading Union*, 1897, pp. 158. Vaughan's essays in this compilation are 'Browning's Relation to other Poets of the Century,' pp. 13-16, and 'The Love Poems of Browning,' pp. 73-79. Vaughan had shown active interest in the work of the Union; he was chairman of the Council of the Cardiff Branch of it. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that all he did and wrote for it were gratuitous contributions to the cause it represented.

27. To "The Magazine of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire":—

Vol. 2, No. 1, Nov. 1889, THE GREAT CRYPTOGRAM, pp. 18-21.

This is a satirical addition to Donnelly's cryptogram, proving Bacon's authorship of *Twelfth Night*.

Vol. 4, No. 1, 1891, To YONGE CLERKES: BALLADE DE MAL CONSEYL, p. 71.

Humorous verse in the manner of Chaucer.

Vol. 4, No. 2, March 1892, THE KNAPSACK, pp. 33-35 (an essay on walking).

Unsigned, but identified by one of V.'s friends.

Vol. 6, No. 3, June 1894, A SKETCH OF DEAN VAUGHAN, pp. 1-6.

An unsigned article, but certainly by Vaughan, on his uncle, then newly elected President of the College.

Vol. 8, No. 1, Dec. 1895, THE EPISCOPAL JUDAS, p. 16.

A verse satire on the Church Union's attack on the Bishop of Hereford, Dr. Percival, who had been Vaughan's head at Clifton. It is not signed but is almost certainly Vaughan's.

Vol. 8, No. 2, March 1896, A SKETCH OF PRINCIPAL VIRIAMU JONES, pp. 41-44.

Also unsigned but identified as Vaughan's.

Vol. 10, No. 1, Dec. 1897, A MEMORIAL NOTICE OF DEAN VAUGHAN, pp. 1-2.

Again unsigned, but believed to be by Vaughan: his account of Dean Vaughan in the *Dictionary of National Biography* is entered above, No. 16.

Vol. 11, No. 4, 1899, BALLIOL FIVE AND TWENTY YEARS AGO, pp. 137-145.

Vol. 13, No. 2, Dec. 1900, SHAKESPEARE AS A MAN, pp. 57-62.

This is the report of a lecture which Vaughan gave to the Literary and Debating Society of the College on December 11, 1900, that is, after his migration to Newcastle. Echoes of the welcome he received on the occasion of this visit to Cardiff will be found on pp. 75 and 85 of this same number.

Vol. 13, No. 5, June 1901, A MEMORIAL NOTICE OF VIRIAMU JONES, pp. 193-197.

This is signed C. V.

Vol. 15, No. 3, Feb. 1903, A SKETCH OF PROFESSOR LITTLE, pp. 87-89.

This is signed C. V., and was written on the retirement of Professor Little from his Chair at Cardiff.

Vol. 7, New Series, 1909, RECOLLECTIONS (OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, CARDIFF), pp. 33-35.

Vaughan was Professor of English at Cardiff from 1889 to 1898. He resigned to become Professor at Newcastle (1899 to 1904). The *Magazine* has several records of parts he played in College life at Cardiff. He was President of the Debating Society: a lecture before it on Bismarck is reported, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1889, p. 48; another on Pedantry in Vol. 3, 1890, p. 36. A further number (Vol. 11, No. 3, February 1899) has many items relating to him, and arising from his resignation of the Chair. There is a portrait; there are appreciations by A. G. L. and by A., an account of a presentation made to him by the students, a report of his speech on that occasion, and lastly a few words with which he took leave of his last class at Cardiff. The next number of the same volume

records a further presentation, this time from old students. It may be added here that no articles by Vaughan have been identified in the magazine of Armstrong College (*The Northerner*), nor in that of Manchester University (*The Serpent*).

28. To "The Gryphon":—

Vol. 10, No. 1, Nov. 1906, *SHAKESPEARE IN FRANCE*, p. 9.

This is but a brief résumé of a lecture delivered before the Literary and Historical Society of the University of Leeds, and so is not one of Vaughan's writings in the same sense as are the other items of this list. Yet as many of them are, though fuller, reports of his speeches a point has been strained to provide opportunity for naming this little thing, and with it, the *Gryphon*, the Magazine of the University in which Vaughan's last professorial years were spent (1904 to 1912). Shortly after his retirement from Leeds, the *Gryphon* printed an appreciation and a cartoon (Vol. 16, No. 5, May 1913).

#### D. OCCASIONAL AND MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS.

29. *Under* "Philosophical Lectures and Remains of Richard Lewis Nettleship." Edited with a biographical sketch by A. C. Bradley and G. R. Benson. *Macmillan*, 1897. 2 vols.

In the Preface to the former of these volumes (by A. C. B.) it is stated that the persons jointly responsible for their publication are the editors named on the title-page, and Professor C. E. Vaughan, one of the executors of Nettleship's will. But Vaughan's responsibility was almost entirely legal: there was, however, a project to publish, as further Remains, a set of Notes of Nettleship's lectures on the History of Philosophy, and if this had matured, Vaughan would have been called in for more strictly editorial duties.

30. *Under* "The Vaughan Working Men's College, Leicester, 1862–1912." Its History and Work for Fifty Years. Edited by the Rev. Edward Atkins. With . . . a Preface by C. E. V. . . . *Adams Bros. & Shadlow, London and Leicester*. n.d.

The brief Preface (pp. 3-4) by Vaughan, is dated March 1912. The volume is a commemorative record of an institution of which Vaughan's uncle, the Rev. David James Vaughan, was founder. The first chapter, pp. 11-28, by C. J. Bilson, and the second, pp. 29-36, by Agnes A. Evans, give some account of the Vaughan family.

31. *Under* "Tales of the Ridings," by F. W. Moorman. With a Memoir of the Author, by C. E. V. . . . *Elkin Mathews*, 1920.

The Memoir of Moorman, who had been Vaughan's colleague in the English Department during the whole of Vaughan's tenure of the Chair at Leeds, and who was tragically drowned on September 8, 1919, fills pp. 7-20. On the whole it is not one of the more satisfying of Vaughan's writings.

32. *Under* "Flights in Fairyland." By the staff and pupils of Lothian School for Girls, Harrogate. Edited by Jean Miller and Rose E. Speight. Introductory remarks by C. E. V. . . . and Mrs. J. E. Buckrose. *Saville & Co., Gower St.* n.d. (1923). Pp. 60.

Vaughan's Remarks are four paragraphs, pp. 4-5, written at the request of one of the editors, Miss Speight, who had been a pupil of his at Leeds. Vaughan never saw the book in print; proofs reached him in the last days of his fatal illness. But it is altogether a fitting circumstance that in this, the last item of the record of his literary works, the last act, indeed, of his literary life, we

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should see him stretching out a hand of encouragement and aid to one of the many hundreds of his former pupils, who are, in fact, far more than the books recorded here, his real works.

(A postscript may call attention to Obituary Notices in *The Manchester Guardian*, Oct. 9, 1922, by C. H. H(erford); in *The Yorkshire Post*, Oct. 10, by M. E. S(adler); in *The Gryphon*, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 2, Nov. 1922, by Professor Rhys Roberts; in the *English Association Bulletin*, No. 47, Jan. 1923, by A. G. Little; in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Jan. 1923, by the Editor.)

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## INTRODUCTION

IN politics, as in religion, the Reformation opened a new page of history. It was a revolution not merely in the chain of outward events, but also—and for our purpose still more—of the thought, the ideas, the theories which lay behind them. Once allow the appeal from authority to private judgement in matters of faith, and it is impossible, as the Reformers were soon to discover, to disallow it in matters of government. Once admit Luther and Calvin, and it is impossible to shut the door against Milton and Cromwell, against Locke and the Revolutionists of 1688. The form which the principle of private judgement naturally takes in politics is the right of the governed to appoint their governors, with the corresponding right of deposing them as soon as they cease to be acceptable. Hence the theory of ‘the original contract’ between King and People, between governor and governed, a theory which took shape in the last quarter of the sixteenth century; which gradually enlarged itself, so as to include a still more primitive, a still more fundamental contract—that between the individuals who unite in the given instance to form a given community; and which, so enlarged, became avowedly in the hands of Locke what it had always been by implication, a theory of individual rights. This theory—perhaps the most popular theory ever propounded—held the field, practically unquestioned, for at least two centuries after its first appearance. It received its death-blow partly from the Utilitarians; partly, though he himself was but half aware of what he was doing, from the hand of Rousseau.

The former of these assaults was, for the moment, the more deadly of the two; in this country, at any rate, the Utilitarians carried all before them. Priding themselves on getting rid of all mystical conceptions—all that could not, in the last resort, be reduced to desire for pleasure—they rejected rights, they repudiated

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the very idea of Right, and based the whole political as well as the whole moral life of man upon self-interest or 'utility.' This theory was first put forward by Spinoza. But in an age which, not without reason, still clung to the principle of rights, his plea naturally fell upon deaf ears. Three-quarters of a century later it was revived, and revived in a far subtler form, by Hume. It received its final shape—a shape from which all traces of subtlety had been carefully removed—from the intensely practical, no less intensely unspeculative genius of Bentham. It is hard for an Englishman to realise, but it is the fact, that this theory, which, in the land of Bentham swept everything before it for at least three-quarters of a century, never took root upon the Continent. It was a theory for the British market, and for that alone.

Each of these two theories, the utilitarian theory, no less than the theory of abstract rights, is manifestly one-sided. Each of them, in fact, supplies the elements, or at least some of the elements, which the other studiously ignores. The one can see nothing but the rights of the individual; it pays no heed to the circumstances which hem him in, and which, in reality, go far to determine, not merely the degree in which it is possible for him to attain them, but even his very capacity for conceiving them, of defining what exactly he reckons them to be. The other maintains that the outward circumstances are those which alone determine man to action; of his power to mould them, to assert himself against them, to fight for any ideal other than the utmost pleasure that may be drawn from them, it makes no admission whatever. Thus the utilitarian principle exaggerates the bondage of man, no less—perhaps even more—than the rival principle exaggerates his liberty. Both principles, therefore, because one-sided, are manifestly abstractions. And the only hope of removing that taint of abstraction was to discover some wider principle which would unite the truths hitherto so jealously isolated, which, while embracing fresh elements, hitherto entirely neglected, should above all set itself to reconcile the two fundamental elements that previous theories had held rigorously apart.

The first step towards such a theory was taken when, in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Vico, and Montesquieu after him, bethought themselves of turning from the analysis of abstract ideas to the concrete realities of man's history: of asking

themselves, 'What, in fact, is the course that man's life, as a member of civil society, has taken? What are the motives—above all, what are the ideas—which the facts furnished by the answer to that question ultimately involve?' Both writers followed this vein of enquiry in the character rather of historians than of political philosophers. Their main object is to understand the past, and make it intelligible to others. It is only in a lesser degree that they interest themselves in questions of political theory. With Burke, on whom fell the mantle of Montesquieu, the case is exactly the reverse. His genius revealed for the first time what was the real significance of the historical method, the 'new science' which his two predecessors had discovered; what the decisive part it was destined to play in the subsequent course of political speculation.

Thus the new method brought with it a new outlook upon man's political existence, and the essence of the change was this: that now for the first time that existence was treated not as an assemblage of fixed elements, each of which might be isolated from the others, but as an organic whole, each activity of which was inseparably bound up with all the others, no one of which could be modified without causing a correspondent change in all the rest. This is the idea which lies behind Montesquieu's definition of 'law' as essentially a relation between one object, or group of objects, and another: a definition in which the whole subsequent course of his argument is implicitly contained. This is the idea, which, still more obviously, inspires Burke's fiery assault upon the disruptive policy of the French Revolution in its earlier stages; upon the 'systematic simplicity,' the deliberate endeavour to suppress all 'variety,' to trample upon all 'individuality,' which, by what he seems to have regarded as 'an unforced choice, a fond election of evil,' was the distinctive character of its close.<sup>1</sup> This, finally, is the idea which, whether more or less completely comprehended, has largely gone to determine all subsequent developments of political theory, as well as of the practical movements with which—as cause, or effect, or both—they have gone hand in hand.

Now it needs little reflection to show us that this argument goes to destroy the credit both of the utilitarian and, still more, of the individualist position. It is hostile to the former, because it

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Edmund Burke*, ed. Rogers, 1850; vol. ii. p. 314-15: *Letters on a Regicide Peace*.

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opens men's eyes to the vast complexity of their political existence; because it compels them to recognise that the State, so far from basing itself solely upon material interests, draws its life also, and no less, from the more spiritual elements of man's nature: from his moral and religious instincts, from the beliefs and traditions which he has inherited from the past, from the passions and prejudices, both good and evil, which are either inherent in his nature or have been fostered by the circumstances, historical and otherwise, in which he is or has been placed. To the latter it is still more obviously fatal, because the first inference to be drawn from it is that the individual, as conceived by Locke and others, is a pure fiction of the imagination; that from the first syllable of recorded time man has always appeared as member of some kind of society; and that by the peculiar character of that society, far more than by any qualities he may have received from nature, he has been moulded to what he is.

The historical argument thus implicit in Montesquieu and more eagerly driven home by Burke is reinforced by the more speculative argument first definitely put forward in the *Contrat Social* of Rousseau, by the plea that no State can worthily fulfil its functions unless it is based, at least in principle, upon the total surrender of every member to the 'general will' of the community at large, the subordination of the individual to the 'corporate self'; by the further plea that the individual as such—the 'unsocial, uncivil individual'—is the mere creature of his 'physical appetites' and selfish interests, real or imaginary—in one word, a 'stupid and limited animal'; that it is the civil state which alone trains and unfolds his faculties; which alone teaches him the 'mastery of himself,' and gives him 'moral liberty'; which alone, therefore, 'makes of him a reasonable being and a man.' Such is the main burden of Rousseau's argument in his crowning treatise, and it is manifestly intended for the ears of the individualists. Yet for the Utilitarians also the *Contrat Social* had a message, if they had been minded to listen to it. But, as that message was perhaps unintended and certainly went unheeded, this is not the place to speak of it in detail.

That all the elements—political, economic, religious, moral and the rest—which go to make up the life of the community are inseparably bound together; that all the members of that community unite to form one organic whole, one 'corporate self': such are the two ideas—the one first formulated by Burke and Montes-

quieu, the other by Rousseau—which lie at the foundation of the modern conception of the State. And the history of the last century and a half is the history of successive endeavours to work them out with ever-increasing fullness of detail, and that alike in theory and in practice.

Considering the complexity of the problem so stated, it is small wonder that many of these attempts have been only partially successful. The various Socialist sects on the one side, the German philosophers on the other—each of these were blind to at least one element of the problem. The Socialists have shown an ever-increasing tendency to resolve everything into a question of economics. Fichte and Hegel outbade each other in tacitly replacing the community by the Government, which, on any sound theory, is presumed merely to represent it. The inevitable effect of this was to destroy that principle of individuality which is necessary to the healthy life of every community, and without which the unity of the State sinks into a mere mechanical uniformity. Yet, with all these aberrations—aberrations which, in the latter case at any rate, get to the root of the whole matter—both schools alike have the merit of insisting upon the rights of the community as against those of the individual, of the ‘corporate’ as against the merely personal ‘self.’ And that is a side of the truth which neither Utilitarian nor champion of abstract rights—for at bottom the one was as crabbedly individualist as the other—was ever able to grasp. Over and above this service, which is common to both these schools in question, the Socialists have the further merit of exposing the abuses inherent in the present distribution of property; of proclaiming the necessity of reforming, if not of altogether abolishing, the economic system which we have allowed to impose itself upon us from the past. And that, it need hardly be said, is a service in which the prophets of the ‘absolute State’ can claim no part nor lot.

Engrossed as they are with the economic, which is above all a practical question, the Socialists have paid comparatively little attention to the more speculative side of political theory. They stand, therefore, in some measure apart from the main line of our enquiry, and for our purposes, Fichte and Hegel, who are nothing if not speculative in their methods, are of more importance. They range themselves in the direct line of succession from Rousseau

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(who in his turn stands in close connection with Burke and Montesquieu) to Mazzini. They form the connecting link between the prophet of a contract which demands the total surrender of the individual to the community on the one hand, and the apostle of nationality—a nationality, however, rigorously qualified by the duties which all nations alike owe to the wider whole of humanity—upon the other. The very exaggerations of which they were guilty may fairly be reckoned to have made the emphatic protest of Mazzini a necessity. Their infatuation for the ‘absolute state,’ for the unbridled right of the stronger nation to trample upon its weaker rivals, may well have borne its part in impelling Mazzini to place all nations alike under the wider, the less partial and therefore the juster law of humanity as a whole. That at any rate—or rather the insight which enabled him to give its due weight to each of the elements (the individual, the Family, the Nation-State, Humanity, which, in an ascending scale, combine to form the political existence of man)—is the enduring service which he rendered to political theory. And beyond that, so far as the wider issues of the matter are concerned, no subsequent thinker has yet gone. It is with the name of Mazzini, therefore, that the historian of political theory may provisionally close.



## CHAPTER I

### BURKE

#### I

WITH Burke we reach the central point of our subject. Before him the theory of individual Rights had been assailed both on the right flank and on the left. It had been riddled in the name of history and experience. It had been torn to pieces in the name of speculative consistency. But up to this time the two assaults had been conducted without concert. Between the two lines of attack there had been no understanding or co-operation. Vico and Montesquieu had kept themselves within the ground of history. Rousseau, though less exclusively, had in the main confined himself to that of philosophy and speculation. In Burke, on the other hand, the two assaults are combined; the lines, which hitherto had run parallel, at last begin to converge. The historical criticism is enlisted in the service of a speculative idea; the speculative idea receives form and body from the historical method. The assault, thus doubly directed, was doubly damaging in its effect. More than that; each line of the argument was deeply modified by contact with the other.

The full fruits of Burke's genius were not gathered till the closing years of his life. Had he died before the French Revolution he would have been known solely as a great orator and statesman. In the history of Political Philosophy he would have hardly found a place. Yet, looking back over his earlier years, in the light of those which followed, we are able to see that, even in them, he contributed something solid to political speculation; that his speeches and pamphlets, whatever else they may be, are masterpieces of the historical method, such as, in matters of practical politics, have never been approached. The affairs of the home country, the affairs of the American colonies, the affairs of India, all in turn are sifted to the very bottom. The crucial point in each case is laid bare. The cause of the difficulty is traced to its first beginnings. And the remedy proposed is that

which experience, in like cases, has proved the most effectual. It may be said that this is the method which all statesmen who know their business have employed. And, in a certain sense, this is true. The difference is that Burke uses it with more industry, with more constancy, above all, with more insight, than any man before him; possibly than any who have followed in his steps.

Moreover—and for our purpose this is yet more significant—Burke never ceases to be conscious what weapons he is handling; he chooses them deliberately and of set purpose. If he appeals to experience, it is because he knows that the only alternative is an appeal to prejudice or self-interest; if to expediency—and that, for him, is only another name for experience—it is because his opponents invoke the name of certain traditional or chartered Rights. Thus, from the very first, the ground is marked out with absolute precision. From the beginning, Burke recognises that, in method and principle, the struggle is between expediency and judicial Right.

In the first work of importance<sup>1</sup>—that which deals with the dispute between the Patriot King and his incensed subjects—it is true that this radical conflict of principles remains, of necessity, in the background. Even George III. and the sophists who supplied him with arguments were shy of appealing to a Right which could hardly be asserted with decency and was certain to rouse the keenest resentment. In this case, therefore, Burke was fighting with a masked foe; and, to some extent, he was fighting in the dark. It is the more significant that, even in this piece, he should throughout appeal to expediency; to constitutional customs which, unknown and even hostile as they might be to written Statute and the legal Rights embodied in Statute, were yet firmly rooted in the history of the past; to the impossibility of combining the forms of popular government with the reality of arbitrary kingship; to the necessity which every Government is under of conforming its measures and policy with the known temper of the nation it is set to guide, of the people, however ‘untoward,’ whose ‘affairs it is their fortune or duty to administer.’<sup>2</sup>

On the other two subjects which engrossed his earlier years—the taxation of the American colonies and the affairs of India—

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, 1770. It was preceded only by *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), which will fall to be noticed in connection with his later speculations, and by *Observations on a late State of the Nation* (1769), in reply to a Grenville pamphlet, in which he is of necessity confined to the narrow ground measured out by his opponent.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, i. 124, 125. Compare *Letter to Sheriffs*: *ib.* p. 216.

## BURKE

the challenge had been thrown straight in his teeth; and he fought with the gloves off. In both cases, his opponents based their policy upon a claim of Right; of constitutional Right, in the one case, of 'chartered' Right in the other. In both cases, Burke joyfully seized the chance of meeting the hated principle on its own ground. When he might have won an easy victory by denying the Right, he deliberately preferred to admit it; and, in the same breath, swept it contemptuously from the judgement-seat, with the assertion that no Right is worth anything unless it receive the sanction of expediency.

The case of India is the simpler; and for that reason, though it arose later, may conveniently be taken first. We are concerned only with a fragment of the vast subject; with the questions which sprang from Fox's East India Bill at the close of 1783. It was admitted by all responsible men—by Pitt, no less than by Fox—that, to stay manifest abuses, it was necessary to transfer the control of Indian affairs, either in whole or in part, from the Company to some less interested power. The Bill, when produced, was liable to grave objections which, in the end, prevented it from passing. With the more solid of these, it is unnecessary to reckon. It is enough to say that the disinterested body proposed by Fox—and Fox was commonly held to be the mouthpiece of Burke—was a body independent of the Crown, bearing no necessary relation to the Government, and therefore presumably dependent upon the political party, that of Fox himself, which was destined to appoint it. The clamour raised on this point was eventually—and, on the merits of the case, justly—fatal to the Bill. But it is not the point with which our present argument is concerned.

Among the other objections to the Bill it was argued, on behalf of the Company, that the whole scheme was an attack on the 'chartered rights of men.' Upon this argument Burke flew with the instinct of long-smouldering hatred. It is round his answer to it that he groups the whole substance of his reply. All other objections are dismissed with a brief notice at the close. Fully six-sevenths of his speech—which must have taken five hours in delivery—are devoted to tearing the hapless 'rights of men' in pieces.

The very form of the phrase lent itself to ridicule. It was, as Burke said, 'full of affectation.' (Even Pitt himself—and it is little to his credit—used the 'affected' and misleading phrase at a later stage of the debates.<sup>1</sup>) And, enchanted by the opening thus given him, he slips for the moment into an admission—repeated afterwards, it must be confessed, in his assaults on the

<sup>1</sup> See his speech of Jan. 14, 1784, *Speeches* (1806), i. 108.

French Revolution—that there is such a thing as the ‘natural rights of mankind,’ and that they are ‘sacred.’ The bearing of this admission upon his theory as a whole is a matter which must be reserved for future consideration. For the present purpose it is enough to say that he defines such rights as being of a nature to ‘restrain power and to destroy monopoly’; and asserts, truly enough, that any charter which embodies and sanctions such rights—such, for example, as Magna Charta—must of necessity bear the same character. The East India Charter, he continues, ‘is framed on principles the very reverse. It is a charter to establish monopoly and to create power.’

In spite of this he is not only willing, but eager, to admit ‘the existence of those chartered rights, in their fullest extent’ and ‘without a shadow of controversy.’ ‘They belong to the company in the surest manner; and they are secured to that body by every sort of public sanction. They are stamped by the faith of the King; they are stamped by the faith of parliament; they have been bought for money, for money honestly and fairly paid; they have been bought for valuable consideration, over and over again.’ So far as Right goes, the position of the Company is not to be assailed.

Here, however, Burke turns the tables upon his enemies. What, he asks, is the worth of a Right when it has been abused? What is the sanctity of a charter when it has been made an instrument of misgovernment and oppression? It is the essence of all Rights, of all privileges, to impose duties on the holder. And when those duties are violated, the Right is shaken; in extreme cases it is altogether forfeited. ‘Such privileges are all in the strictest sense a trust; and it is of the very essence of every trust to be rendered *accountable*; and even totally to *cease*, when it substantially varies from the purposes for which alone it could have a lawful existence.’<sup>1</sup>

Can it be proved that this is true of the East India Company? Can it be shown that its abuses are flagrant and beyond hope of reform? This question brings Burke straight to the principle which he consistently opposes to that of Right, under whatever form it may seek disguise; to the experience of the past and the lessons which it offers to the guidance of the present. And during the rest of this argument—which, as we have seen, forms the bulk of the whole speech—he sets himself to bring home to his hearers, firstly that ‘there is not a single prince, great or small, in India, with whom they—the East India Company—have come into contact, whom they have not sold; secondly, that there is not a single treaty they have ever made, which they have not

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. 276.

broken; thirdly, that there is not a single prince or state who ever put any trust in the Company, who is not utterly ruined.' And that in a 'territory larger than any European dominion, Russia and Turkey excepted,' and 'with a population more than four times the number of persons in the Island of Great Britain': a population, moreover, 'not abject and barbarous, but for ages civilised and cultivated—cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods; millions of ingenious manufacturers and mechanics; millions of the most diligent, and not the least intelligent, tillers of the earth.' 'And through all that vast extent of territory there is not a man who eats a mouthful of rice, but by permission of the East India Company.'<sup>1</sup> 'What use'—is the end of his indictment—'has the Company made of their vast power? None; far worse than none. England has erected no churches, no hospitals, no palaces, no schools . . . Every other conqueror of every other description has left some monument, either of state or beneficence behind him. Were we to be driven out of India this day, nothing would remain, to tell that it had been possessed, during the inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the orang-outang or the tiger.'<sup>2</sup>

The details of this argument, amassed as they were with boundless diligence and enforced by touches of the most vivid imagination, lie beyond our province. We have only to deal with the method, which is the appeal to history; with the principle, which is the appeal to a generous expediency; with the assault, which is on the idea of Right. And if we bear in mind that, in his view of things, Right is always contrasted with, and opposed to, expediency, it is in the third point that we shall find the key to the whole discussion. This appears most evident from the passage with which the speaker clinches his long argument at the close:

'It has been said, if you violate this Charter, what security has the charter of the bank, in which public credit is so deeply concerned, and even the charter of London, in which the rights of so many subjects are involved? I answer—In the like case they have no security at all—No, no security at all. . . . If the City of London had the means and will of destroying an empire and of cruelly oppressing and tyrannising over millions of men as good as themselves, the charter of the City of London should prove no sanction to such tyranny and such oppression. Charters are kept when their purposes are maintained: they are violated, when the privilege is supported against its end and object.'<sup>3</sup> Would it

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. 277.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 302. I understand 'kept' in the sense of 'allowed to stand' and 'violated' in the sense of 'cancelled.' This seems to be demanded by the context, but it might have been more clearly expressed.

be possible to find a more explicit assertion of the principle that the last appeal is not to Rights but to expediency? That Rights are granted, and must only be granted, conditionally on the performance of duties?

The Right combated by Burke in the matter of India was Right in the sense of chartered privilege, of claim conferred by royal grant or by written Statute; and that is the narrowest of all the senses which the elusive term will bear. In the next, and last, matter with which we have to deal—that of the American colonies—the Right put forward by his opponents was Right in the wider, but still specific and concrete, sense of constitutional usage, and this again merged into a Right in the more abstract sense; a claim inherent in the relation between the governing power and the governed. But here too—and this applies whichever of the two senses we take—Burke is a resolute enemy to the principle; and the broader the application of the idea, the wider the ground he takes up against it. For this reason, his American speeches and writings are yet more important than those on the affairs of India. They throw a yet clearer light upon his methods and on the principles which lie behind them. His views on this subject are embodied in two great speeches, that on *American Taxation* (1774) and on *Conciliation with America* (1775). They are to be found also in the less known, but not less notable, *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777).

The constitutional Right asserted by Grenville, Lord North and George III. was that of the mother country, through her Parliament, to tax the Colonies. The Right, it was alleged, was inherent in the sovereign power; and the Colonies were under—it was even added, admitted themselves to be under—the sovereign power of the King and Parliament of Great Britain. This was at once the constitutional and the abstract Right; and it was reinforced by considerations of equity. The mother country had spent great sums on defending the Colonies against France during the late war (1757–63); and it was perhaps not unnatural that she should wish to reap some return for her services. The last point is apart from the main argument. But Burke is able to prove triumphantly that during the last thirty years—above all, during the Seven Years' War, recently ended—the Colonies had contributed generously, by way of free grant, to the British Exchequer.<sup>1</sup> We are then thrown back on the main issue, the claim of Right. And there can be no doubt that in the mind of the King—and probably of his Ministers also, so far as they had a mind of their own—this was the sole issue at stake. The King, who never lost sight of his mother's precept, 'George, be King,' was keenly

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. p. 198.

jealous of the growing spirit of independence shown by the Colonies, and was determined to assert his sovereignty. For one reason or another, the majority in successive Parliaments—eventually, it is probable, of the nation itself—was eager to follow his lead. And first in one form, then in another, the supposed Right was enforced. The result, after a struggle which lasted for half a generation, was the loss of the Colonies.

Throughout this long struggle Burke—who entered Parliament directly after the first assertion of the Right by Grenville—was in the van of the opposition. And the ground he took, allowing for the difference of circumstances, was precisely the same as that which we have already seen that he took a few years later, in the case of India. The Right asserted by the King and his Ministers was a Right far more disputable than that of the East India Company in the constitutional sense. It was a Right which, even granting that it had once existed, had been so long in abeyance that to the mind of all reasonable men it must have been reckoned as lapsed beyond all hope of recall. In the abstract sense it was now standing idle. There was, therefore, the strongest temptation to deny it altogether. Against this temptation Burke, both in word and deed, stood proof from the outset. The repeal of the Stamp Act was, with his full concurrence, if not upon his advice, accompanied by a Declaratory Act which asserted the Right of the mother country to legislate for the Colonies ‘in all cases whatsoever.’ That this was never intended—by Burke at any rate—to open the door for future taxation is clear from the sequel. To him it was no more than a method of waiving the question of Right—of leaving it entirely without prejudice. None the less, it was in effect, though not in intention, an assertion of the Right to tax. And all that was left for the next Ministry, which succeeded to office within a few months of the passage of the tax measures, was to put the assertion in practical operation. This was done by the imposition of six new taxes in 1767. Burke, who acted throughout with unquestioned good faith, offered vigorous opposition. ‘You will never,’ he said, ‘see a single shilling from America.’ But in reality he was hoist with his own petard. The course he had taken ended in disaster. But it is impossible not to admire the constancy and firmness of the man who took it.

Once more, then, Burke thrusts the question of Right impatiently aside. And once more he throws himself solely on expediency. ‘I am not here going,’ he says, ‘into the distinctions of rights, nor attempting to mark their boundaries. I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions: I hate the very sound of them.’<sup>1</sup> And again: ‘I am resolved to have nothing at all to do with the

<sup>1</sup> *Taxation: Works*, i. p. 173.

question of the right of taxation. Some gentlemen startle—but it is true; I put it totally out of the question. It is less than nothing in my consideration. . . . My consideration is narrow, confined and wholly limited to the policy of the question. I do not examine whether the giving away a man's money be a power excepted and reserved out of the general trust of governments: and how far all mankind, in all forms of polity, are entitled to an exercise of that right by the charter of nature. Or whether, on the contrary, a right of taxation is necessarily involved in the general principle of legislation and inseparable from the ordinary supreme power. The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy. It is not what a lawyer tells me I *may* do, but what humanity, reason and justice tell me I *ought* to do.<sup>1</sup>

From these passages, two things clearly result; on the one hand, the nature of the Right against which Burke is for the moment contending; on the other hand, the nature of the principle in the name of which he disallows it. The Right here is not the chartered Right of the East India Company, nor is it even the constitutional Right which flows either from written Statute or from long-established and well-recognised custom. It is rather the abstract Right which may be deduced either from the general nature of government or from the general claims of the individual, as such, against the government which he has created. It has nothing to do with 'the law of the land,' nor with the constitutional practice of a particular country. It is an universal Right; the same always, everywhere and for all. So at least it is represented by Burke; though it may be doubted whether either the King on the one side, or Chatham upon the other, would altogether have accepted the description.<sup>2</sup> For us, however, the point is not what

<sup>1</sup> *Conciliation: Works*, i. p. 192. Compare *Sheriffs: ib.* p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> 'It is my opinion that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the Colonies. At the same time, I assert the authority of this kingdom over the Colonies to be sovereign and supreme in every circumstance of government and legislation whatsoever. They are the subjects of this kingdom, equally entitled with yourselves to all the natural rights of mankind and the peculiar privileges of Englishmen; equally bound by its laws, and equally participating of the constitution of this free country. The Americans are the sons, not the bastards of England. Taxation is no part of the governing or legislative power. The taxes are a voluntary gift and grant of the Commons alone. In legislation the three estates of the realm are alike concerned; but the concurrence of the Peers and the Commons to a tax is only necessary to clothe it with the form of a law. The gift and grant is of the Commons alone. In ancient days the Crown, the Barons and the Clergy possessed the lands. In those days the Barons



the champions of Right may have said in fact, but what Burke conceived them to have said. And it is certain that it is not against the constitutional, but against the abstract, side of their argument that his big guns are directed. He speaks as though he were contending not against practical statesmen, but against abstract theorists, such as Hobbes or Locke.

Confining ourselves, then, to the point of abstract Right, we have to distinguish between two different, and indeed contrary, interpretations of it in this case. On the one side stood the King and his Ministers. On the other side stood, if not Chatham, at least those who reasoned, or might conceivably have reasoned, in the vein which Burke in this passage apparently attributed to Chatham. The former argued that the Right of Taxation was inseparable from and logically contained in that of sovereignty: the latter, that the Right of granting money was essentially a Right of the individual; and consequently that it belonged to the Commons, solely as a body representing certain specified individuals and in no wise as an integral part of the sovereign Power of the State. The former, it need hardly be said, were in favour of taxing

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and the Clergy gave and granted to the Crown. They gave and granted what was their own. At present . . . the Commons are become the proprietors. . . . When, therefore, in this House, we give and grant, we give and grant what is our own. But in an American Tax, what do we do? We, Your Majesty's Commons for Great Britain, give and grant to Your Majesty—what? Our own property? No, we give and grant to Your Majesty the property of Your Majesty's Commons of America. It is an absurdity in terms' (Jan. 14, 1766: *Speeches of the Earl of Chatham*, 1848, pp. 71-2). It will be observed that there is only one phrase—the natural rights of mankind—in which Chatham employs the distinctly abstract argument. The whole of the rest of the argument is constitutional. It is true that at a later moment, when goaded by Grenville's taunts into a reply, he distinguishes his previous argument—as one of Right—from the argument of justice, equity, policy and expediency (pp. 74-5), into which he immediately launches. And it is, perhaps, to the latter argument that he alludes when he says, 'For the defence of liberty upon a general principle, upon a constitutional principle, it is a ground on which I stand firm; on which I dare meet any man' (*ib.* p. 75). But even if this be the case, it would be absurd to say that because he describes the latter argument as constitutional, he implies that the former is not. He was, after all, not a pedant, but a statesman. The truth is that his argument from first to last is constitutional, or it is nothing. His appeal is to the constitution of England, as established by the practice of centuries, or it is without meaning. He may invoke the sanction of 'the natural rights of mankind'; but that is because, with pardonable pride, he considers them to be identical with the practice which had grown up upon the soil, to be embodied in 'the constitution of this free country,' whose 'genius' he was in the habit of 'invoking.'

the Colonies; the latter, like Burke himself, were stoutly against it. But, whether he agreed or differed from the practical conclusion, Burke would have nothing to say to the argument by which it was supported.

What, then, were his objections to such arguments? On what grounds does he reject all pleas that are based upon conceptions of abstract Right? It would seem that the grounds of his objection may be reduced to two. Such arguments, in his view, are of necessity arbitrary; they are entirely off the point, and, as often as not, they lead to bad practical results. They are arbitrary; for there is no known means of deciding what is, and what is not, a Right. Each man forms his own list of Rights by accident or caprice; and when he is challenged, is unable to give any valid reason for his opinion. Hence the whole question of Rights is an impenetrable jungle; it is 'the Serbonian bog, where armies whole have sunk,' and in that bog Burke 'has no intention of being overwhelmed, however respectable may be his company.'

Such arguments, however, are not only arbitrary. They are irrelevant, and therefore so far from guiding, are only calculated to mislead. Politics are concerned not with speculation, but with practice. The test by which all political measures should be judged is, therefore, not 'speculative perfection,' but practical advantage. It is Expediency, not Right. A Right may be on our side; but it may often happen that we are injured by enforcing it. And who but a fool would throw away the substance to grasp a shadow which can offer no advantage, and may bring nothing but discomfiture and defeat? In the present case, what England professes to seek by the assertion of her alleged Right is either money or authority. In neither point can she gain anything—in both points she runs the risk of losing much—by the assertion. 'A revenue from America transmitted hither—do not delude yourselves—you can never receive it—no, not a shilling';<sup>1</sup> and, in trying to exact it, you will spend millions. And as for authority, the only result of asserting a Right, to which America will never submit, is to imperil such power as till now she has been willing to concede you. You stake all on a gambler's throw. You are only too likely to lose all in the gamble.

It may be objected that expediency, like Right, is a word of many meanings; that it has a narrower, as well as a wider sense; that, if it signifies the good of the whole community, it can also be used to denote the narrowest self-interest, the advantage of a class, a faction, or even a small group of individuals. It is in the former sense, and the former sense alone, Burke answers, that the term may legitimately be used. For the statesman, who, by the

<sup>1</sup> *Conciliation: Works*, i. 203.

nature of the case, is set there to direct the affairs of the whole community, that is the only meaning that the word can logically bear. It is indeed, in the abstract, possible that he may be called upon to balance the claims of his own community with those of mankind at large. But, in the present instance, no conflict of that kind arises. And on principle, as well as by temperament, Burke was never willing to give his opinion on a case which was not—and, considering its rarity, might, in all probability, never be—before him. The question, accordingly, in his mind reduced itself to a very simple issue. Is it an abstract Right—a right which, at best, is doubtful, and which can be enforced only with much loss and probably with much bloodshed—or is it the advantage of the nation, as a whole, that is to guide our conduct in the matter? And the answer comes without a moment's hesitation. 'The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy. It is not what a lawyer tells me I *may* do; but what humanity, reason and justice tell me I *ought* to do.' Or again, in a different, but kindred, matter—a matter which grew out of the actual declaration of war between the mother country and the colonies—'Lawyers, I know, cannot make the distinction for which I contend, because they have their strict rule to go by. But legislators ought to do what lawyers cannot; for they have no other rules to go by, but the great principles of reason and equity, and the general sense of mankind.'<sup>1</sup>

The above passages are important for another reason. In both of them—particularly, in the latter—Burke slips almost unconsciously from Right in the distinctively abstract to Right in the strictly legal sense; from the Right inferred out of certain universal principles by the philosopher to the Right inferred out of certain particular statutes by the lawyer. The distinction is of importance rather to theory than to practice; and that is doubtless the reason why Burke fails explicitly to make it. But there is another omission to which this defence can hardly be reckoned to hold good. That is his failure to distinguish in so many words between Right in the strictly abstract sense—in this instance, the right which belongs to all men, as men, of giving or withholding their money as they please—and what, in the widest sense, may be described as the constitutional Right of Englishmen to be taxed only through and by their representatives; a Right which flows not so much from the letter, as from the spirit, of the English Constitution.

The truth probably is that he had an instinctive dislike to the use of the term Right in any connection; and that, while bowing to the practice of the English Constitution with a reverence which

<sup>1</sup> *Sheriffs: Works*, i. p. 208.

was almost superstitious, he looked askance at all attempts to invest that practice with the further sanction of a Right. Chatham had been guilty of the attempt; and Burke could not resist the temptation of mocking at his methods. In this particular instance he was, no doubt, further biassed by his own action in the past; by the necessity of defending the Act which had 'declared' the right of the mother country to 'legislate for the Colonies in all cases whatsoever.' And this was a far more serious incursion into the region of Right than any which had been made by Chatham. The inconsistency of attacking all forms of appeal to Right, in the very act of defending one of them, is glaring. But, by putting a bold face on the matter, he may have hoped to hide the inconsequence from others; perhaps he succeeded in hiding it from himself.

But, whatever his perversities and inconsistencies, there can be no doubt that he attached the utmost value to constitutional practice; and that, so far as human frailty allowed, he interpreted that practice not in a pedantic, but in a liberal and generous, sense. The American question is a case in point. Again and again he makes appeal to constitutional usage, 'to the ancient policy and practice of the empire,' which affords, as nothing else can, a 'sure ground,' which has been tried by experience and will not be found wanting. 'Leave the Americans as they anciently stood, and these distinctions, born of our unhappy contest, will die along with it. They and we, and their and our ancestors, have been happy under that system. Let the memory of all actions, in contradiction to that good old mode, on both sides, be extinguished for ever. Be content to bind America by laws of trade; you have always done it. Let this be your reason for binding their trade. Do not burden them by taxes; you were not used to do so from the beginning. Let this be your reason for not taxing. These are the arguments of states and kingdoms. Leave the rest to the schools; for there only they may be discussed with safety.'<sup>1</sup> 'I only wish you to recognise, for the theory, the ancient constitutional policy of this kingdom with regard to representation, as that policy has been declared in acts of parliament; and, as to the practice, to return to that mode which uniform experience has marked out to you as the best; and in which you walked with security, advantage and honour until the year 1763.'<sup>2</sup>

The same argument runs through the second, and more impressive part of the *Speech on Conciliation*,<sup>3</sup> and, in a lower key, it forms the undertone of his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*.<sup>4</sup> In the former, when he demands concessions to the 'rebel' Colonies, he bases his plea on concessions made long before, but under like

<sup>1</sup> *Taxation: Works*, i. pp. 173-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Conciliation*, i. p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> *Conciliation*, i. pp. 193-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Sheriffs*, i. pp. 208-9.

conditions, to Ireland, Wales and the Counties Palatine. He 'consults the genius of the English Constitution.' In the latter he dwells with convincing force upon the danger arising to the whole Constitution from the violation of any part of it. In form, no doubt, he differs from Chatham. But, in substance, he follows him more closely than he himself would perhaps have cared to own.

That Burke should lay marked stress upon the constitutional argument was only to be expected. Alike on principle and by temperament, he was bound to do so. His conservative instinct, his resolve to test everything by experience, left him no choice in the matter. And his appeal to the Constitution is only one form among many of the argument from expediency. It remains only to state that argument in all its bearings, as it appears and reappears throughout the speeches and writings of Burke not only during the first period of his career, but also during his years of conflict with the Revolution in France. It is as valid in application to the internal affairs of England as to her dealings with the Colonies or with India. It is hardly less valid—if employed with the same knowledge and wisdom, it would have been, within certain limits, not one whit less valid—when applied to the affairs of France.

The first thing which struck Burke, as he looked out on the field of politics, was the enormous complexity of the needs and interests at stake. Each fresh question that presents itself has its own peculiarities; no one of them can be rightly decided unless those peculiarities are reckoned with, unless all crucial conditions and circumstances are taken into account.<sup>1</sup> This alone makes it impossible for the statesman to act on abstract principles; such principles as the Rights, on either side, to which reference has been made in connection with American Taxation. General principles, indeed, he may and ought to have. But these general principles must themselves be drawn not from 'the schools,' but from experience; and they must be modified to suit the circumstances of the particular case. 'Circumstances, which with some gentlemen pass for nothing, in reality give to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect.' Nor is this all. Each part of a nation's life is so closely intertwined with the others that it is impossible to touch one organ of its activity without gravely affecting the action of the rest. The statesman has, therefore, to consider not only a single train of circumstances, stretching back into the past and pointing forward to the future. That, in itself, would be difficult enough. He has also to consider the numberless threads and fibres by which those circumstances are inextricably woven into the general contexture of the whole. He has to look not only before and after, but also, and with no less

<sup>1</sup> *Conciliation: Works*, i. p. 183.

vigilance, to the right hand and the left. Touch the existing system of parliamentary representation, and you run more than a risk of upsetting the balance of the whole constitution. Employ high-handed methods in America, and you will soon come to tolerate them in your own country. Give a free hand to 'the lawbreakers' in India, and you will soon see them become 'the lawmakers' in your own Parliament at home.

For these reasons, caution is the first duty of the statesman. And by caution, when he is true to himself, Burke means not blind timidity,<sup>1</sup> but an anxious consideration of all the circumstances, collateral as well as immediate, of the given case. He means, that is, an appeal to the experience of the past. He means also that the clue by which the statesman guides himself through the tangled web of that experience is the principle of expediency. And expediency, as he conceived it, is not the interest of the moment; it is the permanent welfare of the whole nation and its dependencies. It is not only, nor is it mainly, the material—still less the selfish—profit of the community; it includes also all that makes for its moral and spiritual growth. In other words, the 'expediency' of Burke comprises two ideas which, in common speech, we are careful to hold apart. On the one hand, it denotes enlightened self-interest; on the other hand, the whole train of ideas which we sum up under the word 'duty.' If we may adapt his own phrase, It is what a generous prudence tells me it is wise to do; but it is also—and no less—'what humanity, reason and justice tell me I *ought* to do.' The use of the same term to cover conceptions so different may be a pitfall to the unwary. In the practical issues of life, expediency and duty are closely intertwined, and Burke refuses to mark the bounds between them. But it is intensely characteristic of Burke's method and temper that of the two terms which offered themselves to choice, he deliberately prefers the more modest and unassuming; he fastens on that which, from the beginning, bars the road of mere intuition or personal caprice, and at once throws the statesman on the path of close enquiry and the lessons of experience.

That it is a path strewn with difficulties, Burke himself would be very ready to admit. But this, in his eyes, is among the strongest arguments in its favour. How can we expect, he argues, that the art of politics should be exempt from the law which governs all other fields of human energy and enquiry; the law which ordains that nothing shall be given to man save what is wrung from the sweat of his brow and the toil of his intelligence? 'Difficulty is a severe instructor, set over us by the supreme ordinance of a parental Guardian and Legislator, who knows us better than we know ourselves, and loves us better too. *Pater ipse colendi haud facilem esse*

<sup>1</sup> 'Complexional timidity,' *Reflections: Works*, i. p. 474.

*viam voluit.* He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper. This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object. It will not suffer us to be superficial.<sup>1</sup> And it is among the heaviest charges against the revolutionists of France that they have shown 'a degenerate fondness for tricking short cuts and little fallacious facilities'; that 'their purpose everywhere seems to have been to evade and slip aside from difficulty.'<sup>2</sup>

Such passages bring us to the heart of Burke's thoughts upon this matter. In the first instance it is a question of method. But behind the question of method is a question of tendencies and ideas. The first business of the statesman is to make himself master of all the circumstances which bear, directly or indirectly, upon the problem he has to solve. And in the act of doing so, it is Burke's faith that he will already have committed himself to a conservative solution. The two points must be taken separately; for it is manifest that the one does not of necessity follow from the other.

On the question of method, as a general principle, enough has been said already. It would, however, be unjust not to remind ourselves that Burke in no way contents himself with laying down the principle. He is also a shining example—in all probability, the most complete example ever known—of its practical application. His enquiry into the historical grounds of the dispute between the Colonies and the mother country, his practical suggestions as to the best means of settling it, are remarkable enough. But his investigation of the conditions of Indian life and the tangled web of Indian politics, and his exposition of the havoc wrought in them by English oppression, are little short of a miracle. The industry with which, in the face of enormous obstacles, he collects his facts, the skill with which he marshals them, the genius with which he drives them home to the imagination of his hearers—can we honestly say that, in these qualities, he has ever been approached? The two speeches on America, the speeches on Fox's East India Bill and the Impeachment of Hastings remain models of the manner in which the historical method may be applied to the current problems of the day. They are to those problems what the great work of Montesquieu is to the recorded annals of the past.

So far as to the question of method. Burke, however, was the last man in the world to treat method as a thing apart; the first to admit that it is inseparably interwoven with questions which, until we pause to reflect, we are apt sharply to distinguish from it, as questions of principle and idea. To him, the historical method means the appeal to experience; the appeal to experience means the acceptance of expediency; and the acceptance of

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections: Works*, i. p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*

expediency, in its turn, means the absolute rejection of all considerations of Right. How far, we ask, is the connection between these four things as invariable and as inevitable as he supposed? How far, in fact, is he justified in the scorn which he habitually pours on all forms of the principle of Right? The first link in the chain is clearly not to be disputed. To a statesman, the historical method does necessarily mean the appeal to experience. But does it follow that, when he appeals to experience, he commits himself to the principle of expediency, pure and simple? Does it follow that he bars out all considerations of Right?

This question brings us back once more to the various senses in which the two terms, Expediency as well as Right, may be employed. Expediency may mean no more than enlightened self-interest. But it can also be used, and by Burke is habitually used, to include the idea of 'reason, justice and humanity.' Unless this be remembered, all kinds of false distinctions, distinctions which Burke himself flatly repudiates, will be imported into the question. Still more fatal are the confusions arising from the various senses of Right. A legal Right, a constitutional Right, a moral Right, an abstract Right—here we have four conceptions, each manifestly distinct from the others, and three at least of them—for in the case of a moral Right there may conceivably be difference of opinion—capable of being contrasted with Expediency.

Now a legal Right—a right which is legal and nothing more—is undoubtedly barred out by Burke's interpretation—perhaps by any possible interpretation—of Expediency. And the same is true also of Constitutional Right. Either of these can be invoked to enforce a plea already established by Expediency. Neither the one nor the other can stand for a moment, if Expediency be against them. This is Burke's contention, and it is justified a hundred times over by both reason and experience. No instance could have proved it more conclusively than the issue of the American war; and never was Burke more convincing than when, towards the close of the war, he reminded the Ministry how fatally his prophecies had been borne out by the event. 'Oh excellent rights, oh valuable rights, which have cost us so much, and which are likely to cost us all! Oh miserable and infatuated ministers, miserable and undone country, not to know that right signifies nothing without might.'<sup>1</sup>

When, however, we turn to 'moral rights,' the difficulties thicken. The reason is twofold. In the first place, the phrase 'moral right' is itself ambiguous. It may denote a right which, though denied by the Law, is yet sanctioned by the general conscience of the community or mankind: for instance, the

<sup>1</sup> Prior's *Life of Burke* (ed. Bohn), p. 209 (an. 1781).



right of a starving man to steal a loaf, or the right of the wife to shield her husband from the clutches of the Law. In such cases, the 'moral right' is explicitly contrasted with a legal right; and it is hardly on grounds of expediency, even in the widest sense, that the question will be decided. Blind impulse, pity, affection, will have far more to say in the matter than considerations of utility.

But 'moral right' may bear quite a different sense; and in this sense we do undoubtedly oppose it to expediency. I may have a moral as well as a legal right to exact payment of that which is owing to me. Yet it may be to the last degree inexpedient because entirely against humanity to enforce it. My conscience may tell me that it is not only legal, but, as a general rule, just and equitable to exact restitution of my 'debts.' It may also tell me that, in the given case, it would be unjust and inequitable to do so. Here the 'moral right' is, in reality, a purely abstract right; and, owing to the particular circumstances of the case, it has become, for me here and now, a manifest wrong. It will be observed, however, that this example belongs to the field of private, not to that of public, right; to the sphere of morality rather than of politics. And the question may be raised whether, in the field of politics, a precisely parallel case could ever arise. The question admits of an easy answer. Suppose the State, as in Ireland at the present moment,<sup>1</sup> to be, either avowedly or virtually, in the position of landlord. Suppose the original terms of the 'lease' to prove, at a given moment, unduly burdensome to the 'tenant.' Who can doubt that, in such a case, it is the duty of the landlord to abate his just 'rights'—rights, which, in the abstract, are not only legal but moral rights—and to take the loss upon himself? The balance of humanity, and therefore the balance of expediency, is against the enforcement of the right; and there is nothing for it but that the right should be abandoned.

And this brings us to the second ground of confusion in this matter; a ground which is closely connected with the first, and still better calculated to throw light upon the manner in which Burke approaches the whole question. The real reason why, in such cases, the 'moral right' must be abandoned is that it is a right only in the abstract; and that in the concrete case it may easily become—has in this instance actually become—a wrong. This brings it directly under the general principle laid down, in words which have already been quoted, by Burke: 'Circumstances, which with some gentlemen pass for nothing, in reality give to every political'—would it be too much to add 'to every moral' principle also?—'its distinguishing colour and discriminating

<sup>1</sup> [Written in 1910.]

effect.' His objection to 'moral rights'—as to most other forms of Right—is that, in reality, they are, or are capable of becoming, abstract. And it is only if, and when, they do become so, that they are liable to objection. In other words, the enforcement of moral, no less than of constitutional and legal, rights may be contrary to expediency.

It remains only to consider 'abstract rights' in the sense in which the term is most commonly applied by Burke; that is, public rights, whether political or civil, which are supposed to belong to men, as they are men; to be the natural and universal property of mankind. Examples of such rights, on the civil side, would be the right of all men to equality before the criminal and civil law; and on the political side, the right of all men, either directly or through their elected representatives, to an equal voice in the framing of the law and an equal control over the acts of the executive—in plain English, the right of all men to the franchise.

On the former point there can hardly be two opinions. And, despite his jealousy of abstract principles, Burke at all events has no doubt about the matter. He pours scorn on those who 'took post' on the dispute with the Colonies to question 'whether man has any rights by nature, and whether all the property he enjoys be not the alms of his Government, and his life itself their favour and indulgence.'<sup>1</sup> And, in supporting the East India Bill, he prides himself that 'we are going to supersede a charter abused to the full extent of all the powers which it could abuse, and exercised in the plenitude of despotism, tyranny and corruption; and that, in one and the same plan, we provide a real chartered security for the *rights of men*, cruelly violated under that charter.'<sup>2</sup> Both passages admit—it would be more true to say that both loudly assert—the existence of 'natural rights.' Both passages—the former in so many words, the latter by unquestionable implication—are proof that Burke regards a claim to the protection of life and property as among those rights. From both it may be inferred that rights of this class are independent of time, place and circumstance; that they can be limited only by laws equally applicable, and equally applied to all members of the community; and that, with that restriction, it is the first and main duty of all Governments to secure them. Not even in his later years did he ever draw back from this position, or cease to plead for what he regarded as the 'real rights of man,' as against those 'pretended rights' which he covered with contempt.<sup>3</sup> It may be questioned whether, on his principles, it was legitimate to recognise 'natural rights' of any sort or kind. It may also be questioned whether,

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to Sheriffs*, i. p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> *India Bill*, i. p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> *Reflections*, i. pp. 403-4.

having once admitted them in the case of civil matters, he was entitled to bar them out—as he does absolutely bar them out—in political concerns. These, however, are questions which it is well to reserve till we come to his later writings, together with his whole treatment of the rights of men in the political sense. For the present it is enough to note that in the case of the elementary civil rights, of equality before the Law, he makes an exception to his general condemnation of all abstract principles. In this one instance, but in this one instance only, he is content to admit that ‘circumstances count for nothing.’

What, then, is the result of our enquiry so far? What, in the first stage of his career, were the precise contributions of Burke to political theory? The answer is that, though in the first instance concerned with purely practical questions, he left his mark both on political principle and on political method. On the one hand, he stood side by side with Hume and Bentham in their assault upon abstract ideas of Right, in their constant reference of everything to expediency. On the other hand, he took up the method employed with brilliant results by Montesquieu, in matters of historical research, and applied it, with at least equal success, to the still more difficult problems of current politics. In his eyes, the one thing was the inevitable consequence of the other; the appeal to experience, the careful scrutiny of circumstance and condition, was the sole method of discovering what, in the given case, is demanded by expediency. The connection had often been admitted in words. But Burke was the first to work it out patiently in practice. Here, probably, if we confine ourselves to his earlier years, is to be found the lasting significance of his work and its true originality.

## II

The French Revolution called out in Burke powers which must have astonished those who knew him the most closely, and whose very existence can hardly have been suspected even by himself. Hitherto his task had lain solely with the practical problems of the statesman. He had prided himself, almost to ostentation, on eschewing theory. Except on compulsion he had never touched it; and then only in so far as was necessary to expose the fallacies of his opponents. Now, however, all this was to be altered. The revolutionists appealed straight from practice to theory; from the bitter experience of the past to a golden dream which they hoped to realise, if not in the present, at least in the immediate future. And Burke, hating the changes

thus suddenly proposed and as suddenly carried out, hating still more passionately the theories by which they were supported, had no choice but to turn theorist himself; to meet the theories of innovation with a theory which might justify to himself and others the instinctive hatred aroused in his own breast by the triumphant rashness of the 'aeronauts of France.' His later writings may have little or no value as a judgement of facts and events. As a contribution to political theory they are of the last importance. Never had his feelings been so deeply stirred. But the passion, which blurs the vision of common men, gave fresh force and keenness to his.

The Revolution brought a wholly new group of questions into the field of theory as well as practice. And the first thing Burke had to consider was—How far are the old methods capable of meeting them with effect? Hitherto he had combated the principle of Right by the principle of expediency. He had met the abstract arguments of his opponents by an appeal to the concrete lessons of the past. And to men such as Grenville or the proprietors of the East India Company—to men who were always ready to desert the plea of Right for the homeliest use and wont—the answer was complete. To such men Right was merely a cloke for avarice or love of domination. For the thing itself they had no care. They were rooted, as firmly as Burke himself, in the existing order, the order which had come down from the past; and Right itself was to them merely the practice of the past. The only difference was that, while they clung blindly to the past, he interpreted it in the light of humanity and discretion. The revolutionists stood on utterly different ground. They looked on the past not only with indifference but with hatred. And for Right, the Right which is the same at all times and under all circumstances, they had a consuming passion. With them, therefore, the appeal to expediency, to what has been proved practicable in the past, could have no weight whatsoever. A course commended on these grounds was, in their eyes, a course to be eschewed, which, for that very reason, stood irretrievably condemned. How was Burke to deal with this sudden change of front? What new arguments could he find to fling into the scale?

Broadly it may be said that he met the revolutionists with two different, but convergent, lines of attack. On the one hand, he deepened and strengthened the old argument from expediency. On the other hand, he sharpened his weapons against the ideas which lay at the very root of the argument from Right. On the one hand, he set himself to prove that the life of every State is inevitably conditioned by its past; and that from that past it is impossible for the present to escape. The attempt to do so, he urges, is wholly

against nature; and that is the real reason why, even if possible, success would be utterly inexpedient. On the other hand, he denies that the individual, as conceived by the revolutionists, has any existence whatsoever. And from this denial it follows that the rights of the individual, as assumed by them, are a pure dream of the imagination. Different as the two assaults are, it is clear that they have the closest possible connection. They start from the same ground: the faith that man, as we know him, is the creature of his past. They lead to the same conclusion: that the being thus moulded by society and by circumstance can have nothing in common with the unsocial, abstract, individual, imagined by the revolutionists. And it is manifest that both are applications—applications far deeper and more original than anything yet attempted—of the historical method; that both assume the impossibility of arriving at speculative truth in these matters by any method which is not founded upon a searching study of man's history in the past.

With this connection between the two arguments before our mind, it is well to take each of them by itself. A glance is enough to convince us that an entirely new edge has been given to the argument from expediency. Hitherto it had been little more than a counsel of calculation and timidity. Now it becomes an appeal at once to inevitable necessity and to memories from which, however we may stifle them, it is seldom possible entirely to escape. That, even in its new shape, the argument should bring conviction to the revolutionists was not to be expected. Burke himself had no illusions on this score. The 'Jacobins'—and even in this country he reckoned them as about eighty thousand; that is, by his own admission, about 'one-fifth' of the intelligent part of the population, of what he calls the 'natural representatives of the people'—were, in his eyes, 'utterly incapable of amendment'; beyond all reach of 'reason, argument or authority.'<sup>1</sup> Yet, even to these men, the argument in its new form was far more difficult to meet. And to the public which Burke had immediately before his eye—to those of his own countrymen who had hailed the dawn of the Revolution with eager approval and had not yet opened their eyes to the vast issues which lay behind—it came with irresistible force; and, so far as can now be judged, it was this part of the appeal which did more than anything else to sweep England on to the side of reaction and repression.

It must not, of course, be concluded that Burke abandoned the old plea for caution, the old argument that the past is likely to be wiser than the present. On the contrary, some of the most gorgeous passages of his later writings are an embroidered statement

<sup>1</sup> *Reg. Peace*, i.; *Works*, vol. ii. p. 289.

of this faith. And, questionable as they are in themselves, it is probable that they weighed heavily with those who were already frightened out of their wits at the deeds and doctrines of the Revolution. When he condemns the Revolution of France because it did not follow the sober precedent set by that of England;<sup>1</sup> when he outrages all truth and reason in an attempt to prove that the 'glorious' Revolution of 1688 was in fact no revolution at all, that it was 'not a revolution made but a revolution prevented';<sup>2</sup> when he crushes Fox and Sheridan with laboured demonstrations that they have wantonly deserted the safe road trodden by Mr. Lechmere and Sir Joseph Jekyl;<sup>3</sup> when he falls foul of the French for rejecting their old system of representation by Estates;<sup>4</sup> for abolishing the old division of their land into Provinces;<sup>5</sup> for dissolving their Monasteries,<sup>6</sup> and reforming the gross abuses of their Church<sup>7</sup>—he stoops to the arguments of the narrowest obstructive and reactionary; and the plea which he urges against these particular changes would be as valid against all changes whatsoever. He had done the same by his own country when he denounced the Reform of Parliament as an act of sacrilege, when he resisted wiser men than himself in their efforts to cut off the 'rotten' or, as he himself in a moment of unguarded candour had called them, the 'shameful parts of our constitution.'<sup>8</sup> But here, at any rate, he had acted in full knowledge of the abuses which he took upon him to defend. In the affairs of France he has not even that poor excuse. He deliberately closes his eyes to the facts of the case, and stops his ears to the proofs of them which lay easily in his reach. He drives all adverse evidence in a passion from his tribunal, and his charge to the jury is avowedly a pæan in praise of 'prejudice'.<sup>9</sup>

The conservative instinct had always been strong in Burke. But never before, save on the question of parliamentary reform, had it absolutely defied reason. Now the unreason spreads itself over the whole field of practical politics. It would be hard to think of a single abuse which he is not prepared to tolerate, or even to defend, 'for fear of worse.' Whatever concessions he may still make to the reforming spirit come merely from the lips.<sup>10</sup> Directly they are brought to the test of action, they are hastily withdrawn. In the happy days before the Revolution the French 'had the elements of a Constitution very nearly as good as could be

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections: Works*, i. 394.

<sup>3</sup> *Appeal: Works*, i. pp. 509-16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.* 446, 455.

<sup>7</sup> *Ib.* 420-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Reflections*, i. 414.

<sup>10</sup> 'A disposition to preserve and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman' (*Reflections*, i. p. 440).

<sup>2</sup> [*Army Estimates*, i. 380.]

<sup>4</sup> *Reflections*, i. 394.

<sup>6</sup> *Ib.* 440-2.

<sup>8</sup> *Taxation*, i. 174.

wished.'<sup>1</sup> 'Some usages have been abolished on just grounds; but they were such that, if they had stood as they were to all eternity, they would little detract from the happiness or prosperity of any State.'<sup>2</sup> Among those 'usages' were an absolute Government, a persecuting Church, a financial system which threw the main burden of taxation upon the peasantry, an administrative system which included arbitrary imprisonment among its weapons, a social system which left the poor at the mercy of the rich. The man who could defend these things could defend anything. Burke had sunk low indeed before he could stoop to such compliances as these.

Here we have the doctrine of expediency in its most pitiable form; of expediency divorced from 'reason, justice and humanity'; stripped of everything that can make it tolerable even for a moment. And we are driven to ask ourselves: 'Is it possible that a principle, capable of such results, should be the last word of political wisdom? Must there not be something wrong with a doctrine which can lead to consequences so detestable as these?' The truth is that the principle of expediency is not, and can never be, an ultimate principle; that everything depends upon the temper and the pre-supposition of the man who uses it; that it is always an instrument of ideas and assumptions more fundamental than itself. The history of the principle in Burke's hands is sufficient proof of this. So long as he was content to put a generous construction upon expediency, so long as he was willing to interpret it in the light of 'reason, humanity and justice,' all went reasonably well. But the moment he lost sight of these higher principles, the moment he dropped the ideas of Right and Duty out of his calculations, he found himself without chart or compass, the sport of every panic, the victim of a terror which 'puzzled his will,' and 'made him rather bear those ills he had than fly to others which he knew not of.'

Against this blind passion, expediency was utterly without power. To other men it has been a passive tool in the service of self-interest. To him it became the helpless slave of timidity, of the coward's resolve to maintain the existing system at all costs, 'for fear of worse.'<sup>3</sup>

The wonder is that any other result should ever have been expected; that expediency, pure and simple, should ever have been accepted as the ultimate principle of politics. In this matter, as in so many others, the parallel of ethics is exact. In the field

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. 394.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. p. 474. Compare as to feudalism, p. 432-3.

<sup>3</sup> See Burke's Defence of himself: 'A politick caution,' etc., *Reflections*, i. p. 474; 'For fear of worse,' *ib.* p. 442.

of ethics, the utilitarians have never been able to make their theory plausible, unless they have tacitly assumed an idea which manifestly thrusts their cardinal principle down from the first place into the second; the idea of duty. So it is also with the field of politics. Indispensable as a secondary principle, expediency can never form the foundation of a system. It is useful as a servant. It makes the worst of all masters. Master only in name, it is invariably a tool in the hand of passions or interests far stronger and far more dangerous than itself.

So far as, either in his earlier or his later writings, Burke attempts to raise expediency to the rank of a first principle, he must be held to have failed. In his later writings he does so more explicitly than in the earlier. There consequently his failure is the more marked and the more disastrous. In the passages just considered, expediency is enlisted in the cause of mere caution and timidity. It reduces itself to the argument already ridiculed by Rousseau—'Propose what is practicable.' And that, as Rousseau replies, invariably means: 'Propose nothing but what is already in practice.'<sup>1</sup>

Yet side by side with the despairing helplessness, the bankrupt conservatism of these passages, we find another form of the appeal to the past which has infinitely more cogency, and which no man who knows his business can entirely contest and reject. It is not only an appeal to the past. It may also be regarded as an improved version of the argument from expediency.

The French both act and argue, Burke urges, as though the State were a mechanism, the materials of which can be collected from any quarter and put together on any principle that the architect may think good. In reality its nature is entirely different. It is a growth which, like plant or animal, has formed itself by slow degrees; the elements of which are given rather by nature than by art; which is moulded silently by its own laws, and to which human foresight and conscious purpose have contributed but little. It is the creation of time, and of forces which, for the most part, are altogether beyond the statesman's control. It is not, he says,<sup>2</sup> quoting from Dryden:

'Tis not the hasty product of a day  
But the well-ripened fruit of wise delay.

Or again, in his own words: 'The winds blow as they list. Institutions are the products of enthusiasm; they are the instruments of wisdom. Wisdom cannot create materials; they are the

<sup>1</sup> *Émile*, Préface: 'Proposez ce qui est faisable, ne cesse-t-on de me répéter. C'est comme si l'on me disait: Proposez de faire ce qu'on fait.'

<sup>2</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 535.



gifts of nature or of chance; her pride is in their use.’<sup>1</sup> And her work consists not in doing violence to nature, but in following her lead. To the wild forces which thus spring from the breast of nature, some guidance may doubtless be given by man. But in the moral world, as in the material, such guidance belongs to none but those who have learned how to follow. In the inner, as in the outer, world man ‘commands nature only by obeying her.’<sup>2</sup> All this implies not only that each community is, in large measure, a prisoner to its past. It also means that each organ of its life is inseparably interwoven with all the other organs; that it is impossible to touch one centre or outlet of its energies without affecting, perhaps imperilling, the health and vitality of the rest. ‘In States there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first view of little moment, on which a great part of its prosperity or adversity may most essentially depend. The science of government being, therefore, so practical in itself and intended for such practical purposes—a matter which requires experience, and even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however sagacious and observing he may be—it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture on pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purpose of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes.’<sup>3</sup>

Burke, it will be observed, studiously avoids the metaphor of the organism. He seems deliberately to prefer that of the mechanism or the building. And when he does draw his imagery from the works of nature, as opposed to those of man, it is rather to the more abstract sciences of chemistry and physics than to the concrete studies of botany or zoology that he turns for his illustrations. The State is a ‘venerable’ castle, a mansion adorned with ancestral portraits; it is the keep of Windsor, looking proudly down upon the well-watered plain beneath; it is a vessel which requires to be cunningly balanced.<sup>4</sup> Or again, its materials are the ‘powers growing wild from the rank productive forces’ of nature; they are ‘the expansive force of fixed air in nitre’; they are ‘the powers of steam, or of electricity or of magnetism.’<sup>5</sup> When in the hands of wicked revolutionists—of ‘the swinish multitude,’ for instance—they are ‘the wild gas, which is suddenly broken loose.’<sup>6</sup> But it would be difficult to

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 440. Compare p. 444-5.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Homo naturae non nisi parendo imperat’ (*Nov. Org.* i.).

<sup>3</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 404.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* i. 394, 475; *Letter to a Noble Lord*, ii. 268.

<sup>5</sup> *Reflections*, i. 440.

<sup>6</sup> *Ib.* 384.

name any passage in which they are the members or organs of the animal or the plant. None the less, in the spirit, if not in the letter, we have the whole theory of the State as an organism; and, with it, the appeal to experience, to 'models and patterns of approved utility,' to the conservative instinct, which in Burke's mind was inseparably connected with the theory of the organism, or, to speak more truly, its inevitable corollary.

The essential thing in this theory is that the elements of the State, the raw materials on which the statesman has to work, are conceived as natural forces; that they are therefore treated as matters rather of necessity than of choice, as things which are not called into being by an act of man's will but which, at least in the first instance, are given to him from without. It is doubtless true that these forces are not to be left wholly to themselves. If they were, they would either waste their strength, or turn it to ruinous results. It is man's task to use them; but to use them, as he would use any other force of nature, by learning their secret and employing the powers they put into his hands for his own purposes and needs. Yet, in so employing them, he must never forget that his control of them is in the last degree limited, and that the moment he outsteps it he turns the force which might have served him into a tyrant or an enemy; that he lets loose a tempest which he is helpless to control. In dealing with moral, as with physical forces, insight and intelligence can work miracles. But solely on the condition that at every step they recognise their own weakness; that, instead of dictating to nature, they consent to learn from her and obey her.

In this connection there are two points which must have struck all readers of Burke's later writings. The first is the unceasing stress which he lays on the criminal folly of departing from 'nature,' of trampling upon the natural instincts of the human heart. It is because they have persistently done this that the revolutionists have given the clearest proof of their incompetence and presumption, and that, sooner or later, they will provoke a violent reaction, they will 'awaken the justice of the world,'<sup>1</sup> against their policy and institutions. 'Why,' he asks, 'do I feel so differently from them, as I contemplate the ravages they have made? For this plain reason—because it is *natural* I should; because we are so made as to be affected at such spectacles; because in events like these our passions instruct our reason. . . . We are alarmed into reflection; our minds are fortified by pity and terror; our weak, unthinking pride is humbled under the dispensations of a superior wisdom. Some tears might be drawn from me, if such a spectacle—(as the leading

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to Member of Nat. Ass.* i. p. 482.

in triumph of the King from Versailles to Paris)—were exhibited on the stage. I should be truly ashamed of finding in myself that superficial, theatrical sense of painted distress, whilst I could exult over it in real life. . . . Indeed the theatre is a better school of moral sentiments than churches where the feelings of humanity are thus outraged.’<sup>1</sup>

And again. ‘In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man. We preserve the whole of our feelings still native and entire, unsophisticated by pedantry or infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God, we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is *natural* to be so affected.’<sup>2</sup> ‘Never was there a jar or discord between genuine sentiment and sound policy. Never, no never, did nature say one thing and wisdom say another.’<sup>3</sup>

The second point is closely bound up with the first. It is the contrast which Burke repeatedly draws between necessity and choice. The latter, the temper which deliberately sets itself to recast the actual world in the light of an ideal, is habitually treated as identical with presumption and caprice. It is to disregard nature, to defy the conditions which nature, whether within or without us, has laid down. The former is persistently associated with the principles which, to Burke, constitute the essence of political wisdom. To bow to necessity is to be guided by experience; it is to take account of circumstance and condition; it is to obey nature, to conform to the general laws or the particular exigencies which nature has imposed. It is the crowning grace, the cardinal virtue, of the statesman. In short—and the words may be taken in their most literal sense—‘there is no virtue like necessity.’

Had the revolutionists been able to prove that they were the victims of necessity, that their reckless policy, their ‘wild waste of public evils’ was forced on them by danger, or even that it was ‘the base result of fear,’ Burke would have been ready to pity, if not to

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> *Regicide Peace*, ii. p. 324; *Nunquam aliud natura, aliud sapientia dicit*, Juv. xiv. 321.

pardon, them. He would have admitted that their deeds, however desperate, were, or, at the least, may have been, 'the last stake reserved for the ultimate ransom of the State.'<sup>1</sup> As it is, they have acted in perfect security, and their only motive is their own wanton perversity. They have been guilty of 'an unforced choice, a fond election of evil.'<sup>2</sup> And the result is that the nature, on which they trample, has taken her inevitable vengeance. Difficulties, entirely of their own making, multiply and thicken on them; and their misfortunes earn for them not the pity, but the contempt and derision of mankind. 'It is the first and supreme necessity only, a necessity that is not chosen but chooses, a necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits no discussion and demands no evidence, which alone can justify a resort to anarchy. This necessity is no exception to the rule; because this necessity itself is a part too of that moral and physical disposition of things, to which man must be obedient by consent or force. But if that which is only submission to necessity should be made the object of choice, the law is broken, nature is disobeyed, and the rebellious are outlawed, cast forth and exiled from this world of reason and order and peace and virtue and fruitful penitence into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion and unavailing sorrow.'<sup>3</sup>

So stated, it is manifest that the argument, from expediency, the appeal to caution and circumspection, is a thing entirely different from what it was in its earlier form, the form it took in the American Speeches and in *The Present Discontents*. There expediency, interpreted doubtless in a generous sense, is an end in itself. A careful reckoning of consequences and probabilities, an unquestioning allegiance to the genius of our own institutions and the traditions of our own past, is prescribed for its own sake; and beyond these narrow limits Burke is scrupulous, and on principle scrupulous, of passing. Expediency—and by expediency he commonly means what our ancestors have thought expedient—is the best policy and that is all. Here, on the other hand, expediency is exalted to the rank and clothed with the sanctity of duty. It is still identified—or identified in nearly every case—with obedience to the past. Not, however, with obedience to the past, as such; but to the past as the only record which can reveal to us the laws by which man is actually governed, as our sole guide to 'nature'; to 'the unalterable constitution of things,'<sup>4</sup> to the settled 'order of the world.'<sup>5</sup> To follow that order is man's duty, as, in Burke's sense of the term, it is his necessity also. And from that necessity he can escape only by a wilful assertion of his own lawlessness; by an 'unforced

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. 396.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> *Reg. Peace*, i.; vol. ii. p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> *Reflections*, i. 394.

choice ' which it is as impious, as it is fatal, to allow himself. So understood, expediency is placed under the sanction, not only of the moral law, but also of religion. To defy it, to depart from the ' proved patterns of utility,' is to violate our duty not only to man, but to God.

So far, the amended version of the theory, no less than the original, has, and is intended to have, a strongly conservative bias. But it is the greatness of Burke that he refuses to be satisfied with a theory which is conservative and nothing more; that he insists on widening its border until it yields room for at least the possibility of change, and even of violent revolution. It is with this end that, so far from limiting necessity to the demands of the existing order, he makes it include the sudden call of circumstances which introduce an entirely new principle into the world of human action, and which, just because they do so, are, even to the wisest, wholly unforeseen. Such circumstances, when they arise, are no less a matter of necessity, no less a part of nature and the irresistible ' order of the world,' than those which are written large in the history of the past, and familiar to all who are capable of reading it. That they are new and without precedent is no reason for ignoring them. To do so is as foolish and impious as to shut our eyes to the common experience of generations. ' For this necessity itself is a part too of that moral and physical disposition of things to which man must be obedient by consent or force.'<sup>1</sup> And ' they who persist in opposing a mighty current in human affairs,' however novel, ' will appear rather to resist the designs of Providence itself than the mere designs of men. They are not resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.'<sup>2</sup>

The last words have an importance which it is difficult to overrate. They are written with avowed reference to the French Revolution. And in this passage—though in this passage only out of the whole body of his writings—Burke admits that the Revolution, which he elsewhere describes as the consummation of all folly and wickedness, may after all be justified by necessity, that it too may be one of those ' varieties of untried being ' through which man is ordained to pass on his way to the goal appointed by a power wiser and greater than himself, a ' part of that moral and physical disposition of things to which man must be obedient by consent or force.'

So far as the application of his theory to practice goes, this admission stands alone. And in the writings which follow, he continues to hurl anathemas against the revolutionists as bitterly as if it had never been drawn from him. But the theory itself, it

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 417.

<sup>2</sup> *Thoughts on French Affairs*, i. p. 580.

must be remembered, had always left a loophole for such applications; or rather, it was framed from the first so as to make room for them and to sanction them. Whether he would ever have been ready to admit that the exceptional case, thus provided for, had actually arisen, whether at all the turning-points of history he would not have been as eager to denounce the innovators as he was in the case of France, is another matter. But that does not entitle us to deny either that such cases are explicitly covered by his theory, or that in practice, if only for one short moment, he relents in favour of even the hated 'aeronauts of France.'

Even with these qualifications, it remains true that the dominant tone of Burke's theory is essentially conservative; that the 'disposition to preserve' is stamped upon it far more strongly than the readiness to 'improve.' The temper of the man made this inevitable. So also did the fundamental principles from which he started. Once admit that the political life of man finds an exact analogy in the organism of the animal or the plant, and it cannot but follow that change is as slow a process in the one as in the others. Once admit that the State is a purely natural product, that it stands 'in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world';<sup>1</sup> and the consequence is that not decades but centuries must be allowed for each stage of its development. Even this analogy, however, does not give the fixity demanded by Burke. Though manifestly present to his mind, on his lips it is always replaced by that of the unvarying laws of chemistry and mechanics; nor is it without significance that the chemistry from which he draws his comparisons should invariably be not organic but inorganic. The more abstract the science, the more completely it serves his purpose for analogy; the more thoroughly it excludes the idea of growth or development, the better is he pleased. To a man charged with such analogies, change in itself was bound to be an object of suspicion. And, when the change was defended on the score not of expediency but of abstract justice, not of necessity but of ideal perfection, the suspicion inevitably deepened into hatred. All sound principles of political action seemed to him to be deliberately thrust aside, and a radically vicious principle to be set up in their place. On the new system, the statesman was no longer to work upon the material which lay ready to his hand; the material transmitted to him from the past, or forged for him by the circumstances of the present. His one task was to refashion all actual institutions on a model created solely by the imagination, to recast the existing order at the bidding of an arbitrary idea. If this system were adopted, there would henceforth be no sure footing for the statesman; no guarantee of permanence for the institutions,

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. 394.

however 'perfect,' which it may please him to set up. The fashion of to-day is likely, nay certain, to be discredited by that of to-morrow; the ideal of one moment to be dethroned by the ideal of the next. Until the new creed was proclaimed, political action was universally held to be guided by fixed principles, by loyal obedience to circumstance and tradition. Based on the nature of things, on the conditions of the given case, these principles might themselves be said to belong to the order of nature. They were imposed on the statesman from without, not coined by his own fancy at random from within. Now, however, all fixed laws are to be swept away. The guidance of nature, of any principle external to man, is to be discarded. Nothing is left for the statesman to follow but his own arbitrary caprice.

It is alleged, indeed, that the new Gospel is a thing fixed and immutable; and that this is the chief reason why it excels the old principles which it endeavours to supplant. 'These teachers profess to scorn all mediocrity; to engage for perfection; to proceed by the simplest and shortest course. They build their politics not on convenience, but on truth; and they profess to conduct men to certain happiness by the assertion of their undoubted rights.'<sup>1</sup> But the rights of one age are not, even in theory, the rights of another. Still less are they uniform when brought, even with the most ruthless obstinacy, to practical application. In the mind of Locke they take a very different shape—for instance, in all matters concerning Property—from that which they bear to Rousseau. As applied by the revolutionists, they appear in a form which neither the one nor the other thinker would have recognised. 'Men with them are strictly equal, and are entitled to equal rights in their own government. Each head, on this system, would have its vote. . . . "But soft, by regular degrees, not yet." This metaphysic principle, to which law, custom, usage, policy, reason were to yield, is to yield itself to their pleasure. . . . The voters in the primary assemblies are to have a *qualification*. What! A qualification on the indefeasible rights of man! Yes; but it shall be a very small qualification. Our injustice shall be very little oppressive; only the local valuation of three days' labour paid to the public. Why, this is not much, I readily admit, for anything but the utter subversion of your equalising principle. As a qualification it might as well be let alone; for it answers no one purpose for which qualifications are established. And, on your ideas, it excludes from a vote the man of all others whose natural equality stands the most in need of protection and defence; I mean the man who has nothing but his natural equality to guard him. You order him to buy the right, which you before told him that nature

<sup>1</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 534.

had given him gratuitously at his birth, and of which no authority on earth could lawfully deprive him. With regard to the person who cannot come up to your market, a tyrannous aristocracy is against him, is established at the very outset, by you who pretend to be its sworn foe.’<sup>1</sup>

There is a further and yet more sinister consequence. ‘The moment any difference arises between your National Assembly and any part of the nation, you must have recourse to force. Nothing else is left to you; or rather, you have left nothing else to yourselves. . . . The king is to call out troops to act against his people, when the world has been told, and the assertion is still ringing in our ears, that troops ought not to fire on citizens. The colonies assert to themselves an independent constitution and a free trade. They must be constrained by troops. . . . As the colonists rise on you, the negroes rise on them. Troops again—massacre, torture, hanging! These are your rights of man! These are the fruits of metaphysic declarations wantonly made and shamefully retracted! . . . You lay down metaphysic propositions which infer universal consequences and then you attempt to limit logic by despotism.’<sup>2</sup> Thus, while in name you appeal to the eternal and infeasible laws of Right, in fact your system is based solely upon caprice; and the sole sanction by which caprice can be upheld is here, as always, force. This is what you gain by deserting ‘nature,’ by leaving the natural road of expediency and tradition. You are driven, by an inevitable necessity, to fall back upon the exploded principles of ‘good pleasure’; and behind ‘good pleasure’ lies nothing but the sword.

The significance of this will become clearer if we consider the application which Burke makes of it for praise and for blame; to the constitution of England and to that of revolutionary France.

The ideal State—need it be said that this is England?—has been slowly built up out of the most diverse materials. It gives scope to every variety of purpose and of interest. It offers, it gladly welcomes, ‘all that combination and all that opposition of interests, all that action and counteraction, which, in the natural and in the political world, from the reciprocal struggle of discordant powers draws out the harmony of the universe.’<sup>3</sup> It lays itself out not for ‘an excellence in simplicity’—‘the simple governments are,’ in fact, ‘fundamentally defective, to say no worse of them’—‘but one far superior, an excellence in composition.’<sup>4</sup> As occasion rises, it is always willing to admit new elements into its system, new materials into the fabric, the living temple, which it has inherited from the past. But it has always

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. pp. 446-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* i. p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. pp. 464-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* pp. 404, 445.



done so with caution and circumspection.<sup>1</sup> It has never made such additions until it is proved that circumstances demand them and until there was reasonable certainty that they would conform themselves to the original design, that they would adapt themselves to the old foundations, that they would maintain the solidity and symmetry of the old structure, that there would be no solution of continuity, still less any violent demolition of walls which have proved their strength against the storm and stress of centuries. Not that alteration should be altogether excluded. 'But even when I changed,' adds the warning voice, 'it would be to preserve. I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance. In what I did, I should follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building.'<sup>2</sup> Yet even here there is room for latitude, he pleads elsewhere in a more liberal vein; and we must not be too curious to insist upon uniformity. On the contrary, 'we often see the end best obtained, where the means seem not perfectly reconcilable to what we may fancy was the original scheme. The means taught by experience may be better suited to political ends than those contrived in the original project. They again react upon the primitive constitution, and sometimes improve the design itself from which they seem to have departed.'<sup>3</sup> 'At worst, the errors and deviations of every kind in reckoning are found and computed, and the ship proceeds on her course.'<sup>4</sup> Such a method—the method of conservation generously interpreted—combines two ends which at first sight it might seem impossible to reconcile. It unites the strength of age and of long prescription with the freshness and the adaptability of youth. 'Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old or middle-aged or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the State, in what we improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain, we are never wholly obsolete.'<sup>5</sup>

France, on the other hand, has taken exactly the opposite course. And the consequences are visible to every eye. They are written large in every kind of folly and criminality. At

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 444.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 474.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.* p. 394.

one moment, in obedience to the alleged rights of man, she has plunged herself into chaos, 'dissolved herself into her original *moleculæ*,' and bid fair to wipe herself for ever from the map of Europe. At the next moment, by an astonishing rebound, she has trampled on the most elementary rights of men, as recognised in all ages and all civilised countries; she has carried fire and sword among her own citizens, and is now straining every nerve to win the tyranny of all Europe. Could there be plainer proof that to 'engage for perfection' is the surest road to an alternation of anarchy and despotism, that, the moment the way of nature, the path of tradition and circumstance, is deserted, no guide is left to man but his own incalculable caprice?

The one principle, to which, in 'all its transmigrations,' the Revolution has remained constant, is the principle of simplicity; the resolve to crush everything which can interfere with the operation of a single idea, or the absolute domination of the State. This, in itself, is enough to condemn the system of the revolutionists. The complexity, which they regard as the worst blemish, is, in truth, the first necessity of any well-constituted State. And it is so for two reasons. It is a security against ill-considered action on the part of the Government. It is a security also for the just rights and liberties of the individual. 'These opposed and conflicting interests . . . interpose a salutary check to all precipitate resolutions. They render deliberation a matter, not of choice, but of necessity; they make all change a subject of compromise, which necessarily begets moderation; they produce temperaments, preventing the sore evil of harsh, crude, unqualified reformatations, and rendering all the headlong exertions of arbitrary power, in the few or in the many, for ever impracticable. Through that diversity of members and interests, general liberty has as many securities as there are separate views in the several' sections; 'whilst by pressing down the whole by the weight of a real monarchy' (as in England) 'the separate parts are preserved from warping, and starting from their allotted place.'<sup>1</sup> And again, 'When I hear the simplicity of contrivance aimed at, and boasted of, in any new political constitution, I am at no loss to decide that the artificers are grossly ignorant of their trade, and totally ignorant of their duty. The simple governments are defective, to say no worse of them. If you were to contemplate society in but one point of view, all these simple modes of polity are infinitely captivating. In effect each would answer its single end much more perfectly than the more complex is able to attain all its complex purposes. But it is better that the whole should be imperfectly and anomalously answered, than that, while some parts are provided for with

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 394.

great exactness, others might be totally neglected, or perhaps materially injured, by the over-care of a favourite member.' <sup>1</sup>

This was what Burke wrote of the Revolution in its earlier phases; at the moment when, in the main, it was still under the sway of the theory of rights. A few years later, the whole face of things had altered. The theory of rights was now practically forgotten. The one aim of France was to exalt the State—and the State in this instance meant nothing but the Government—at the expense of the individual. It was with these facts before him that Burke composed the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796-7). And it was inevitable that his argument should reflect the new conditions which had arisen. The effect of this is to give greater prominence than ever to his crusade against 'simplicity,' to bring his defence of 'complexity' of the State as founded on the clash of sectional and individual interests more sharply than ever to the front. These were the rival principles of which Europe had now become the battlefield; and there were moments when, in his eyes, all else seemed dwarfed into insignificance.

It is in this vein that he says: 'When I contemplate the scheme on which France is formed, and when I compare it with these systems with which it is, and ever must be, in conflict, those things, which seem as defects in her polity, are the very things which make me tremble. The states of the Christian world have grown up to their present magnitude in a great length of time and by a great variety of accidents. They have been improved to what we see them with greater or less degrees of felicity and skill. Not one of them has been formed upon a regular plan, or with any unity of design. And their constitutions are not systematical, they have not been directed to any *peculiar* end, eminently distinguished and superseding every other. The objects which they embrace are of the greatest possible variety, and have become in a manner infinite. In all these old countries, the State has been made to the people, and not the people conformed to the State. Every State has pursued not only every sort of social advantage, but it has cultivated the welfare of every individual. His wants, his wishes, even his tastes, have been consulted. This comprehensive scheme virtually produced a degree of personal liberty in forms the most adverse to it. That liberty was found, under monarchies styled absolute, in a degree unknown to the ancient commonwealths. From hence the powers of all our modern States meet, in all their movements, with some obstruction. It is therefore no wonder that, when these States are to be considered as machines to operate for some one great end, this dissipated and balanced force is not

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 404.

easily concentrated, or made to bear with the whole force of the nation upon one point. . . .

'France differs essentially from all those governments which are formed without system, which exist by habit, and which are confused with the multitude and with the perplexity of their pursuits. What now stands as government in France is struck out at a heat. The design is wicked, immoral, impious, oppressive; but it is spirited and daring; it is systematic; it is simple in its principle; it has unity and consistency in perfection. In that country entirely to cut off a branch of commerce, to extinguish a manufacture, to destroy the circulation of money, to violate credit, to suspend the course of agriculture, even to burn a city, or to lay waste a province of their own, does not cause them a moment's anxiety. To them, the will, the wish, the want, the liberty, the toil, the blood of individuals is as nothing. Individuality is left out of their scheme of government. The state is all in all.' <sup>1</sup>

Every article in this indictment might have been supported by facts; and it would be impossible to state the issue more clearly, or with greater vividness. Once more, but in a far sharper form, it is the contrast between 'comprehensiveness' and 'simplicity of contrivance'; between the organisation which, framed gradually and at random, adapts itself without effort to the most various ends, and that which has been conceived with a single purpose and 'struck out at a heat'; between the polity which, unconsciously and with no settled design, has sprung up at the call of a thousand needs and a thousand conflicting interests, and that which has been forced upon the community at the bidding of a logical theory; in one word, between the natural and the artificial, between the spontaneous and the arbitrary, between the complex and the unitary, State. The contrast is of course presented so as to throw the brightest possible light upon the former, and the darkest possible upon the latter. But, when all invidious constructions have been removed, a solid sediment of truth is left at the bottom of Burke's antitheses; and he was right in thinking that, of all the issues stirred by the Revolution, this was the most enduring and the most vital.

Such, in its general tenor and its most obvious consequences, is the first argument with which Burke assails the political theory of the Revolutionists. It is, as has already been said, the old argument from expediency. But it is the old argument so transformed as to have changed its very nature. In the early form—even when interpreted in the light of the alien principles, 'humanity and justice'—expediency is liable to the charge of being a principle so wide as, for practical purposes, to be of little or no service. The

<sup>1</sup> *Regicide Peace*, II., vol. ii. pp. 314-5.

one definite lead it gives is to brush aside all pleas founded upon Right, abstract, statutory or constitutional. That point once settled, we learn little more than that the most expedient course is the most expedient; and this does not carry us very far. Against the later form of the theory no such objection can be brought. All criticism from that side is but too completely put to silence. To hold fast to tradition, to stand in the old paths, to avoid change so long as it can be avoided, and, when it becomes necessary, to accept it only with the utmost caution and with every possible limitation—these are now the principles which determine expediency and which guide us to the path along which it is to be sought. And apart from an overmastering necessity—a ‘necessity which is not chosen but chooses’—to depart from that path, to break with that tradition, is declared to be not only unwise but immoral. More than this, it is asserted to be a breach of trust not only against our own countrymen, but against mankind at large; not only against man, but against God.

Expediency has thus ceased to be a mere blank. It comes to each nation charged with a host of qualifications and guiding principles, inherited from the past. It comes charged with the strongest sanctions of duty and religion. It is true that, in the process, it has shed much of its elasticity. It is true that its original character has been mislaid, if not altogether lost, by the intrusion of other sanctions. But at least it speaks with a clearer voice, and offers a firmer guidance to the statesman. At least its champion—the greatest champion it is ever likely to secure—has been forced to admit that, in and by itself, expediency is no adequate foundation; that, for practical purposes, it needs to be supplemented by ideas in the making of which it has had little or no part; while, as a speculative principle, it must be controlled by sanctions which, if not hostile, are at any rate wholly foreign to its very nature. Here, for the first time, Burke explicitly severs himself from Hume and the utilitarians. Here, what is yet more important, he deals a deadly blow at those who strive to divorce politics from morals.

We pass now to the second count of Burke’s plea against the ‘metaphysics’ of the Revolution. It is strangely different from the first. But the difference, as will shortly appear, is easily to be explained. If in the later stages of the Revolution, he argues in effect, the regard paid to the individual was too little, in the earlier stages it was altogether too much. If at the later period ‘individuality was left out of the French scheme of government,’ at the earlier period it was worshipped with an idolatry nothing short of a superstition. This is the criticism which runs from beginning to end of the *Reflections*; and, seeing that no other of Burke’s works is so widely known, it has impressed itself far more deeply than the

previous criticism upon the popular imagination. And though certainty in such matters is beyond attainment, it is probable that to Burke himself it would have seemed the weightier of the two; that, much as he hated the authoritarian system of 1797, he regarded the individualism of 1789 with a hatred far bitterer yet.

What, then, are the arguments with which he meets the theory of the individualists? What is the principle which he throws into the scale against the claim, never before urged with such force or consistency, that the individual is author—and therefore in the last resort master—of the State; that he has rights, absolute and indefeasible, as against the State? In his earlier writings he had been content to argue that the enforcement of such rights may often be wholly inexpedient; that the welfare of any community—and in the long run, of the individuals who compose it also—necessarily depends upon the subordination of the parts to the whole, upon the submission of the individual to the general control of the State. In the later writings, above all in the *Reflections*, this argument reappears. It reappears, however, no longer as a thing complete in itself, but as part of a much wider argument, in the light of which its whole character is transformed. The principle of expediency, which had once filled the whole horizon of the orator, now shrinks into a narrow, and altogether secondary, place. The 'Right' of his opponents, once dismissed as at worst a vague abstraction, is now shown to be morally pernicious and as a speculative conception, no better than a contradiction in terms.

The rights to which the Revolutionists appeal, he argues, are, by their own avowal, the rights of the individual. And this means, and can only mean, the individual conceived as apart from, and prior to, any form of society. The individual is prior to society; for no society can rightfully be formed except by the free consent of those who abandon the 'natural state' with the express purpose of founding it. He is apart from society; for, even after he has joined it, he retains certain rights of which no act or resolve of his fellow-members can deprive him. These rights, accordingly, are absolute and indefeasible. As defined by the famous *Declaration of Rights*, they are as follows: Freedom of action, that is, the right to do everything which the Law does not definitely pronounce to be injurious to others; <sup>1</sup> freedom of speech; <sup>2</sup> security of life and limb; <sup>3</sup> security of property; <sup>4</sup> resistance to oppression; <sup>5</sup> and finally the right of all to 'take part in the formation of the general

<sup>1</sup> *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Aug. 26, 1789), Arts. 2, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* Arts. 2, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Arts. 2, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Art. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Arts. 2, 15.

will'—that is, in the framing of the Law.<sup>1</sup> In other words they are so numerous and deep-reaching as to cover wellnigh the whole field of human action, and to leave none but the narrowest margin for the rightful activity of the State. The powers of the State—in this, as in all forms of the individualist system—are rigorously limited. And, such as they are, they exist—so the famous Declaration expressly asserts—for no other purpose but 'to secure the natural and indefeasible rights of the individual.'<sup>2</sup> More than that, they are, in the strictest sense, delegated powers; and the source from which they are drawn is in the first instance the creative will, at all subsequent stages the free consent, of the individual.

In this view of the State, it is plain that everything turns upon the conception of the individual. It is from him that the whole power of the State is drawn. It is to protect his rights that all the resources of the State are to be spent. What, then, is the speculative worth of a conception whose consequences are so formidable? How far is the idea of the individual, so presented to us, valid in itself? How far is it compatible with the activity—or even with the very existence—of the State? On the answer to these questions Burke has no manner of doubt. And in giving it, he delivers some of the shrewdest blows to which the theory of the individualists has ever been exposed. Trace back the history of man as far as you please, and you will always find him, in one form or another, a member of society. That society may be large or small; it may be barbarous, or, in some measure, civilised; it may be the family, or the tribe, or the city, or the nation. But large or small, barbarous or civilised, it is still a community; it is as member of a community, and as that alone, that the individual comes before us. It follows from this that the individual as conceived by the French theorists—the individual, bare, naked and unqualified by social pressure and social tradition—is a thing unknown to history or experience; that what we loosely call the individual is always and everywhere a being moulded by those around him and those who have gone before him; a being who may please to think himself independent and isolated among his fellows, but who in reality is

<sup>1</sup> *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Aug. 26, 1789), Art. 6. Compare also Art. 1: 'Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits,' quoted in *Appeal*, i. p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> 'Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l'homme. Ces droits sont: La liberté, la propriété, la sûreté et la résistance à l'oppression.' It may be noted that in the preamble they are described as 'les droits naturels, inaliénables et sacrés de l'homme' (*ib.* Art. 2). The whole declaration is quoted, among other places, in Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Rév. française* (ed. 1847-62), t. iii. pp. 54-8.

little more than a puppet in their hands; a being whose conception of the world he sees about him, whose moral and social standards, whose beliefs about nature and the unseen powers behind nature, whose very reason, will and conscience are determined almost entirely by the beliefs, customs and traditions into which, with no choice of his own, he happens to be born.

From all this it results that there never has been a time when man existed in the 'state of nature' supposed by the individualists; that society is not the conscious and deliberate creation of man, but something which, so far as we know, has been with him from the beginning; that, even if this were otherwise, it is to society, and not to the phantom which he calls his individuality, that he owes all which is definable in his being; that, if all he thus owes were taken away, nothing tangible—certainly nothing distinctively human—would be left; in one word, that the individual imagined by the Revolutionists is a pure abstraction, a mere delusion, to which there is not, and in all probability never has been, anything corresponding in reality.

Indeed, the individual, so conceived, has not even the merit of logical consistency. It is the essence of the theory to represent him as isolated from society. Yet it can do so only by attributing to him qualities which are inconceivable save in society; the gregarious instinct which makes solitude a misery to him; the power of calculating consequences which is implied in the resolve to abandon his 'natural' liberty for the inevitable restraints of a life in common with others. How except in society, is it possible that these qualities should be acquired? How is it conceivable that they should belong to the being who, *ex hypothesi*, has lived apart from society and who is, therefore, incapable of foreseeing—much more of reasoning upon—either the good or the evil that society is likely to carry in its train?

The individualist theory, as presented by the Revolutionists, is closely bound up with the assumption of an original state of nature. That is the logical framework in which it is cast, the 'historical' garnish in which a long tradition demanded that it should be served up. It might have been expected that Burke should begin by making a clean sweep of that framework; by proving that there was nothing in reason or history to justify that assumption. This, however, is not the case; and that, for the simple reason that in this point, if in no other, he was at one with his opponents. Here, however, the agreement ceases. And, while admitting the state of nature as an historical fact—or, at the least, a convenient hypothesis—Burke is quite clear that between it and the civil state there neither is, nor can be, anything in common, and that to argue from one to another is the grossest



fallacy. In other words, while accepting the state of nature as a fact, he denies that it can have any bearing upon either the theory or the practice of civil government. This marks an immeasurable step in advance of Locke and his French disciples; it even marks an appreciable advance on Rousseau. Rousseau could never bring himself to sever the last link that bound him to the theory of contract, to renounce that free consent of the individual which seemed to him the only possible safeguard against the tyranny of the sword. To Burke, on the other hand, consent can claim no part in the origin of society higher than *de facto*; *de jure*, it has nothing to say in the matter. Contract may be important as a link in a chain of historical events; it has no bearing whatsoever upon Right. As an antiquarian, he may have been mistaken. It is the more to his credit that, as a philosopher, he avoided the false inferences into which almost all those who shared his historical error had been drawn. His argument may not go as far as we should have wished, and perhaps looked for. But, as far as it goes, it is conclusive; and it goes far enough to tear the whole theory of individual rights into tatters. That is the main point; all else, in comparison, is of little moment. The argument, as it may be pieced together from the *Reflections* and the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, is as follows.

The 'state of nature,' if it has any meaning at all, must imply the sharpest possible contrast to the civil state. In the former, each man is his own master, he acknowledges no law but his own will, he is bound by no obligation to other men, his 'rights' are only another—and a highly misleading—name for his 'powers.'<sup>1</sup> These powers may be, and are, limited by a thousand barriers, human and physical, from without; but they know no check whatsoever—no moral law, no conscientious scruples—from within. All this is exactly reversed in the civil state. There no man is his own master; the individual will is controlled by a multitude of checks both from within and from without. It is limited by positive law, and by that social custom which is far stronger than positive law, from without. It is limited still more effectually by the moral law—by scruples of conscience, by an ingrained sense of obligation to others—from within.<sup>2</sup> The rights of the individual are no longer identical with his powers. They are limited both by the inner and the outer law. By the inner law, in so far as nothing can now be a right which is not in accordance with his duty to others. By the outer law, in that many things which, in the absence of settled government, might

<sup>1</sup> 'By these theorists the right of the people is almost always sophistically confounded with their power' (*Reflections*, p. 404).

<sup>2</sup> *Appeal*, i. pp. 522-3. See below, pp. 47-8.

be morally permissible, are now definitely forbidden. In short, he has become not only a moral being, but a member of a certain definite civil order. In the former capacity, he imposes laws upon himself. In the latter, he both accepts an external sanction to those inner laws, and binds himself to obey all the further commands—as, for example, that he shall not be judge in his own cause—which the constituted authority may lay down for the good of the community at large. Such is the startling change involved in the passage from the natural to the civil state.<sup>1</sup>

How this change came about is a question which matters little. It may have been by accident. It may have been—‘in many cases it undoubtedly was’—by ‘a voluntary act.’<sup>2</sup> It may even have been by brute force; for, as the author says elsewhere, ‘we must throw a veil over the beginnings of all government.’<sup>3</sup> But, whatever the cause—in reality, it is no more than an occasion—the result is always the same. The State invariably carries with it a heavy measure of compulsion, ‘Its continuance is under a permanent standing covenant, co-existing with the society; and it attaches upon every individual of that society, without any formal act of his own.’<sup>4</sup> And, whatever the consistency of the process may be, that is no less true of such governments as are founded upon consent—Burke himself does not shrink from the term ‘convention,’ or even ‘contract’—than of those which had their origin in force.

What are the consequences which Burke draws from the principles thus laid down? And, in the first place, what is their bearing upon the theory of Rights? To the Revolutionists, the Rights of the individual are something ‘indefeasible and inalienable.’<sup>5</sup> They are a ‘sacred’ trust which he carries with him, inviolate and inviolable, from the state of nature to the civil state. No power on earth is thenceforth justified in touching them. On the contrary, the civil state is formed with the express purpose of preserving them. They are specifically excluded from the matters which either Government or Community is entitled to meddle with; or rather, they are not, and never can be, among the matters the control of which is delegated to Government or Community by the individuals who unite to create them. They are prior to society, and paramount to society. To lay hands upon them is an act, in the strictest sense, *ultra vires* on the part

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. pp. 403-3; *Appeal*, i. pp. 522-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 522.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches on the Impeachment of Hastings*, i. p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 522.

<sup>5</sup> See *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, Preamble and Arts. 1, 2.

of society; and any society, any State, which should attempt to do so, would, by the mere fact of attempting it, pronounce its own instant dissolution.

In this theory, Burke replies, there is an inherent contradiction. It strives to combine two things which are mutually exclusive; the unlimited freedom of 'nature' with the restrictions and compulsions which are inseparable from the State. Into the very heart of the State—which, as the Revolutionists themselves admit, is the creature of convention, and therefore of compromise—it seeks to import principles which defy convention and are at bitter enmity with compromise. More than that; in any difference between the individual and the State—and, on the revolutionary system, such differences must be of daily, hourly occurrence—it is the former, and not the latter, which is certain to prevail. For the former has absolute, indefeasible right upon his side; the latter has nothing better than expediency and convention. The former is master; the latter, no more than a reluctant, or obsequious, slave. The State, on this system, is the subject; the effective, if not the nominal, sovereignty is vested in the individual. The result is that no State, built on the principle of Rights, can endure for a moment. No sooner is it founded than it is driven to choose between a flagrant breach of Rights which it has pronounced to be sacred and inviolable and a resolution into the fleeting atoms of which it was fortuitously swept together.

'The French despise experience as the wisdom of unlettered men: and as for the rest they have wrought underground a mine that will blow up, at one grand explosion, all examples of antiquity, all precedents, charters and acts of parliament. They have the "rights of men." Against these there can be no prescription; against these no argument is binding; these admit no temperament and no compromise; anything withheld from their full demand is so much of fraud and injustice. Against these their rights of men let no government look for security in the length of its continuance, or in the justice and lenity of its administration. The objections of these speculatists, if its forces do not quadrate with their theories, are as valid against such an old and beneficent government as against the most violent tyranny or the greenest usurpation. They are always at issue with governments not on a question of abuse, but a question of competency and a question of title.'<sup>1</sup>

But if the 'pretensions of these speculatists' are fatal to those Governments which 'do not quadrate with their theories' they are no less fatal to those which do. If they are at war with existing Governments, with those which are based on long usage and historical accident, they are no less hostile to those which

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 403.

profess to found themselves on pure reason and eternal Right. They are incompatible not only with this, or that, form of government, but with government as such. The rights in question, it must be remembered, are not only the *private* rights of the individual; the rights of property, the right of equality before the Law, the rights of the family, the rights of conscience and the like. If they were, there would be something to be said for their sanctity and inviolability.<sup>1</sup> They are, however, much more than this. They are also, and above all *political* rights; in particular, the right of each individual to an equal voice in the government of the community with all the rest. Now, how is it possible that rights which, as the very term 'political' shows, imply the existence of Society and Government, can have existed in the 'state of nature,' in the state of things which is assumed to have prevailed before Society and Government were founded? And if they did not, what becomes of the argument that such rights are inherent in the individual, that they were brought by him from the state of nature into civil society, that Society, the State, was expressly founded for their preservation? The one thing absolutely, and by its very nature, excludes the other. To argue from the one to the other betrays either the wildest confusion, or the grossest sophistry, that was ever heard of.

'As to the share of power, authority and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the State, that I must deny to be amongst the direct, original rights of men in civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil, social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention. If civil society be the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law. That convention must limit and modify all the descriptions of constitution which are formed under it. Every sort of legislative, judicial, or executory power are its creatures. They can have no being in any other state of things. And how can any man claim, under the convention of civil society, rights which do not so much as suppose its existence? Rights which are absolutely repugnant to it?

'One of the first motives to civil society, and which becomes one of its fundamental rules, is that *no man should be judge in his own cause*. By this each man has at once divested himself of the first fundamental right of uncovenanted man; that is, to judge for himself and to assert his own cause. He abdicates all right to be his own governor. He inclusively, in a great measure, abandons the right of self-defence, the first law of nature. Man cannot

<sup>1</sup> Some significant remarks on what Burke calls 'the real rights of man' are to be found in the *Reflections*, i. p. 403—the paragraph beginning 'Far am I from denying in theory.' [Cp. p. 55 below.]

enjoy the rights of an uncivil, and of a civil, state together. That he may obtain justice, he gives up the right of determining what it is, in points the most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty, he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of it.' <sup>1</sup>

And again: 'The pretended *rights of man*, which have made this havoc, cannot be the rights of the people. For to be a people, and to have those rights, are things incompatible. The one supposes the presence, and the other the absence, of a state of civil society. The very foundation of the French Government is false and self-destructive; nor can its principles be adopted in any country without the certainty of bringing it to the very same condition in which France is found.' <sup>2</sup> 'To be a people, and to have those rights, are things incompatible. The one supposes the presence, and the other the absence, of a state of civil society. Man cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil, and of a civil, state together'—in these three sentences is contained the pith of Burke's argument against the theory of individual Rights.

Reserving for the moment any criticisms that may suggest themselves on this, the more destructive side of Burke's doctrine, we pass at once to the constructive argument which he builds upon it. Here, once more, he invokes the principle of expediency; but, once more, he employs it in such a way as to give it an entirely new character. The whole object of Society, he pleads, is to secure the welfare of its members; the whole function of Government, as the directing organ of Society, to provide for the advantage of the governed. Now nothing can be more certain than that this welfare is not secured by a form of society, or by principles of government, which lead—as it has been shown that the French system leads and must always lead—direct to anarchy. For not only is the whole end of Society and Government thereby manifestly defeated. But there is a further consequence which, if possible, is more disastrous yet. The most essential element in man's welfare is not his material comfort, but his moral good; not the assertion of his supposed rights, but the enforcement of his plain duties. Now it is beyond doubt that this end can never be attained without a strong measure of compulsion; a compulsion which needs to be laid not only in the form of criminal justice, upon the individual, but also, in the form of political pressure, upon whole classes of the community. The multitude, the mass of men, as well as the lawless individuals, stand in need of control. That control they will never impose upon themselves. If they are to be controlled at all, it can only be by some power from without. And the control which they, in their turn, are to exercise upon that superior power must be rigidly limited; or their subjection will

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. 403.

<sup>2</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 529.

be nothing better than an empty name. How large a share of such general control may safely be entrusted to the multitude, is a matter to be determined solely by the circumstances of each community; by the degree of wisdom and self-restraint to which, at any given time, the multitude may have attained.<sup>1</sup> To suppose that, at all times and under all circumstances, the multitude has a right to the fullest possible extent of control—much more, to suppose that it has a right to the direct exercise of sovereign government—is a fatal error; an error which carries with it the overthrow of all the purposes for which Society and Government exist. The first, and most essential, right of the multitude, in fact, is not to govern, but to be governed; not to control, but to be controlled. For political rights, so far from being absolute and indefeasible, are in truth measured purely by expediency. And that the multitude should be left free to follow its unruly passions is expedient neither for itself nor for the community at large.

‘Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it; and exist in much greater clearness, and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection. But their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to everything, they want everything. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom. Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a *power out of themselves*; and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense, the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. But as the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they cannot be

<sup>1</sup> A slightly more lenient view of ‘the multitude’ seems to be presented elsewhere. ‘The statesman thinks of the place in which political power is to be lodged, with no other attention than as it may render the more or the less practicable its salutary restraint and its prudent direction. For this reason no legislator, at any period of the world, has willingly placed the seat of power in the hands of the multitude, because there it admits of no control, no regulation, no steady direction whatsoever. The people are the natural control on authority. But to exercise and to control together is contradictory and impossible’ (*Appeal*, i. p. 522; contrast this with the passage below quoted from *Reflections*).

settled upon any abstract rule; and nothing is so foolish as to discuss them upon that principle.

‘ . . . The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and, in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of *middle*, incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned. The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good; in compromises sometimes between good and evil, sometimes between evil and evil. Political reason is a computing principle; adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing, morally and not metaphysically or mathematically, true moral denominations.’<sup>1</sup>

Once again, there are sides of this argument which are questionable, and more than questionable. But, once again, the main principle is sound. Burke was wrong in holding that one class, the ‘swinish multitude,’ stands in more need of control than any other. He was right in maintaining that control of some kind is a necessity. He did well, therefore, to insist that Rights are not absolute and indefeasible, but limited; and limited by expediency; that they are not a possession which each man brings with him ready made into civil society, but a goal towards which he has to strive, a prize which he has to win by merit, a privilege for which he has to qualify himself by creating at least a presumption that he is worthy of its exercise. That is the main point here at issue between him and the Revolutionists; and on this point it is hard to see how his argument can be met.

This, however, is by no means the end of his pleading. There is yet another, a still deeper and more fruitful, principle at stake. Society, he has argued, exists above all for moral ends. That is the justification of compulsion. It is the justification also of the reverence with which all men have hedged round their existing government and constitution. But if all this is to be justified, it must mean that the connection between morality and the State is something much more than an accident; that the one stands to the other, if not as cause to effect, at least as the condition without which it could not come into being; that, for man as we know him, both the sense of duty and the detailed code of duties have their foundation laid in civil society and the State. It is these that have taught man his duties to his fellow men and to God. It is these that have made him a moral being. This does not, of course, imply that such duties did not exist ideally before the foundation of the institutions here in question. On the contrary, they are ‘laid in the unalterable constitution of things.’ They are there, whether the individual, whether men in general, realise them or

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. pp. 403-4.

no. But, humanly speaking, the only channel by which they can be brought home to men is that of which we have experience; the only means through which they can be realised are civil society and the State. It is here then that we must look both for the foundation and the sanction of the whole fabric of our duties. Here is to be found the relation which, as Cicero said, 'comprehends all the charities of all.'<sup>1</sup>

This accounts for the fact that each individual is bound by the social and political order into which he is born; that he is no more at liberty to renounce it than he is to renounce any other of the duties which, just because they are duties, are wholly independent of his will. Once begin to dispute the former, and there is no valid reason why he should not dispute the latter also. Renounce the former, and the latter will inevitably be swept away in its train. For the duties of man are determined by his station; and his station means his place in the order, political and social, into which, with no choice of his own, he is cast at birth. 'If you ask, with the Roman poet, *Quem te deus esse jussit?*, you will be answered when you resolve this other question, *Humana qua parte locatus es in re?*'<sup>2</sup>

It may be objected that the State, for which these wide claims are made, is avowedly an artificial creation; that it was no part of man's original furniture; that it is therefore in no way entitled to the respect which belongs to his primitive instincts and to the ties—such, presumably, as the family—which immediately spring from them. This is the eternal fallacy that first in time is first also in worth; that the seed is more 'natural' than the plant; that the infant—and if the infant, why not the embryo?—is better than the full-grown man. In the case before us, the answer is that, if the State is artificial, so also is the family; so also is the craving for truth, beauty and goodness; all, in short, which gives dignity to human life, and distinguishes the man from the brute. All these things are necessary to man's welfare. None of them, except in a shape so rudimentary as to be barely discernible, is any part of man's primitive endowment. If we question one of them, on the ground that it is not natural, we must question all. If we accept one, we must accept all. The truth is that the later states of any process of growth are just as much entitled to be called natural as the earlier stages; and they are 'natural' in a higher and a nobler sense. The true nature of man, as of all other things which are capable of growth, is that which it lies in him to become; his true self is not the savage, noble or otherwise; but that which has been moulded by time and toil, by endurance and intelligence, above all by the educative power of the State. 'The state of civil

<sup>1</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 523.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*



society . . . is a state of nature; and much more truly so than a savage and incoherent mode of life. For man is by nature reasonable; and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may best be cultivated, and most predominates. Art is man's nature. We are as much at least in a state of nature in formed manhood, as in immature and helpless infancy.' <sup>1</sup>

The truth is that the Revolutionists have never made up their mind whether the individual they have in view is the individual qualified by the moral law, or the individual who is nothing more than a bundle of brute instincts, desires and passions: whether it is the individual as we know him in the civil state, or the individual as he must have been in the state of nature. All their principles point to the latter. But, if this were once acknowledged, their whole theory of the State would instantly crumble into dust. For the individual, so conceived, is not, and can never be, the member of a community or a State. He is unsocial and uncivil, by his very nature. Hence, before their theory can be made even plausible, they are forced to smuggle into the state of nature a moral law, a sense of human fellowship and communal obligation, which can logically find no place there. Having thus imported an alien principle into the state of nature, they redress the balance by importing an equally alien principle into the civil state. As the former is made respectable by the intrusion of moral ideas which have no part in it, so the latter is made unworkable by the intrusion of 'natural' ideas—above all, the idea of Right, 'sophistically confounded with that of power'—which, in theory, are wholly incompatible with it and, in practice, must utterly destroy it.

The earlier stages of this argument are so important—they go so directly to the root of the whole matter—that they must be given in the very words of the author. 'I cannot too often recommend it to the serious consideration of all men who think civil society to be within the province of moral jurisdiction, that if we owe to it any duty, it cannot be subject to our will. Duties are not voluntary. Duty and will are even contradictory terms. Now, though civil society might be at first a voluntary act (which in many cases it undoubtedly was) its continuance is under a permanent, standing covenant, coexisting with the society; and it attaches upon every individual of that society, without any formal act of his own. This is warranted by the general practice, arising out of the general sense of mankind. Men without their choice derive benefits from that association; without their choice they are subjected to duties in consequence of these benefits; and without their choice they enter into a virtual obligation as binding

<sup>1</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 525.

as any that is actual.<sup>1</sup> Look through the whole of life and the whole system of duties. Much the strongest obligations are such as were never the result of our option. . . .<sup>2</sup> We have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special, voluntary pact. They arise from the relation of man to man, and the relation of man to God, which relations are not matters of choice. On the contrary, the force of all the pacts which we enter into with any particular person, or number of persons, amongst mankind, depends upon those prior obligations. In some cases the subordinate relations are voluntary, in others they are necessary—but the duties are all compulsive. When we marry, the choice is voluntary, but the duties are not matter of choice. They are dictated by the nature of the situation. . . . Parents may not be consenting to their moral relation; but consenting or not, they are bound to a long train of burdensome duties towards those with whom they have never made a convention of any sort. Children are not consenting to any relation; but their relation, without their actual consent, binds them to its duties; or rather, it implies their consent, because the presumed consent of every rational creature is in unison with the predisposed order of things. Men come in that manner into a community with the social state of their parents, endowed with all the benefits, loaded with all the duties, of their situation. If the social ties and ligaments, spun out of those physical relations which are the elements of the commonwealth, in most cases begin, and always continue, independently of our will, so, without any stipulation on our own part, are we bound by that relation, called our country, which comprehends (as it has been well said) “all the charities of all. . . .”<sup>3</sup> Among nice, and therefore dangerous, points of casuistry may be reckoned the question so much agitated at the present hour—whether, after the people have discharged themselves of their original power by an habitual delegation, no occasion can possibly occur which may justify the resumption of it? This question, in this latitude, is very hard to affirm or deny. But I am satisfied that no occasion can justify such a resumption, which would not equally authorise a dispensation with any other moral duty, perhaps with all of them together.’<sup>4</sup>

The immediate purport of this argument is questionable enough. It brands revolution as neither more nor less than a

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* into a virtual contract as binding as any that is actual.

<sup>2</sup> The omitted passage refers to the religious sanction of all duties, political as well as private.

<sup>3</sup> In the passage omitted occurs the quotation from Persius, already quoted above, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> *Appeal*, i. pp. 522-3.

breach of the moral law. But behind the practical conclusion there lie premisses which are far sounder and which cut to the heart of the theory of the State. If 'civil society is within the province of moral jurisdiction,' that can only be because it is itself founded not for material, but for moral, ends; because it is a matter not of arbitrary argument, not of accidental convenience, but of principles which are binding upon men under all circumstances, whether this or that individual be consenting to them, or no. It can only be because submission to the State is itself part of the moral law; or even—for it may well be that Burke was prepared to take this further step also—the condition without which the moral law would be impossible and inconceivable. The latter, as we shall see, may or may not be among the presuppositions of the argument. But the former, at any rate, is the assumption which runs through it from beginning to end. And it is there none the less, because it is implied rather than explicitly stated. Contrast it with the principles which, in this country at least, had hitherto prevailed; and we have the measure of the distance which parts Burke from those who had gone before him.

It had been the cherished doctrine, the fundamental principle, of the individualists that the State exists for strictly limited ends, that these ends do not extend beyond the protection of life and property, and that all else belongs by indefeasible right to the control of the individual. This doctrine was not, and could not be, carried out with any approach to consistency in practice. But, from the time of Locke, it had been the ideal of at least all English thinkers. And in this country Burke was the first to raise his voice against it. On the continent, little as he may have thought it, he had, no doubt, been forestalled by Rousseau. It might fairly be urged that, at least on the more speculative side of the matter, his criticism of the individualists is neither so complete, nor so deep-reaching, as that of Rousseau. Yet, even if this be the case, it must be allowed that he worked it out in entire independence of Rousseau, that his theory embodies elements of which there is no trace in Rousseau, and that these elements are of great importance. In him, the speculative argument is cast in an historical framework, it is supported by an appeal to historical experience, of which there is no suspicion in Rousseau. Like Rousseau, no doubt, he mars his argument by accepting, or more than half accepting, the 'contract' as an historical fact. Unlike him, he never supposes it to be the basis of Right. He is thus free from the fatal inconsistency with which, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> Rousseau shackled himself from the beginning.

For the moment, however, we are concerned rather with

<sup>1</sup> [Cf. *Political Writings of Rousseau*, vol. i. p. 42.]

the points in which he agrees with Rousseau than with those in which he differs. And here the facts are beyond possibility of doubt. In asserting the moral claim of the State upon the individual, in maintaining that the sovereignty of the State is not limited, but unlimited, that it is at once the right and the duty of the State to provide not merely for the material, but also for the moral, welfare of its members, and that the individual is under a moral obligation to conform his actions to any laws which the community may think necessary for this purpose—in all this Burke is but restating—in his own way and without any debt, conscious or unconscious, to the *Contrat Social*—what had already been laid down by Rousseau. Nowhere does this appear more clearly than in the passage where, with an eloquence which not even Rousseau could rival, he defines what are the true functions of the State, what time has shown to be the real purpose, the final cause, of its foundation:—

‘Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts, for objects of mere occasional interest, may be dissolved at pleasure. But the State ought not to be considered nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and then dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked upon with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular State is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place. This law is not subject to the will of those who, by an obligation above them and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law. The municipal corporations of that universal kingdom are not morally at liberty, at their pleasure, and on their speculation of a contingent improvement, wholly to separate and tear asunder the bands of their subordinate community, and to dissolve it into an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles. It is the first and supreme necessity only, a necessity which is not chosen, but chooses, a necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits no discussion and

demands no evidence, which alone can justify a resort to anarchy. This necessity is no exception to that rule; because this necessity itself is a part too of that moral and physical disposition of things, to which man must be convenient by consent or force. But if that which is only submission to necessity should be made the object of choice, the law is broken, nature is disobeyed, and the rebellious are outlawed, cast forth and exiled from this world of reason and order and peace and virtue and fruitful penitence, into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion and un-availing sorrow.<sup>1</sup>

The latter part of this passage, perhaps the most eloquent that ever came from the lips of Burke, reverts to the old argument, the moral iniquity of revolutions, which was the theme of the preceding extract. And for the moment we may leave it on one side. The earlier part, however, is of wider scope, and of significance yet deeper. It strikes nearer to the heart of the main problem of political philosophy than any other passage to be found in Burke's writings, with the possible exception of that in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, which has been quoted above. Adopting the language of contract, he puts into it a meaning, which would have spread dismay among its authors. In the opening words, the Contract is represented—it would, at least, seem to be represented—as a literal fact. But as the writer warms to his work, it insensibly passes into a mere metaphor, a form, which is of little or no value apart from the spirit which is, with some violence, breathed into it. The mere act of consent, which to Locke was all in all, has ceased to be of any importance. It has, in fact, come to stand for something very different; an obligation which is binding upon all men, whether they choose to recognise it or no. It is no longer the consent itself, but the thing to which consent has been given—no longer the contract, but the particular obligation contracted—that counts. Under these circumstances, the consent, the contract, is manifestly no true consent, no contract at all. The consent, so far from being actually given, is tacitly assumed. The contract, so far from being matter of choice, is imposed by the necessities of man's nature. And, in the eyes of Burke, it is, for that very reason, far more reasonable than if it had been due to a choice which may be nothing better than accident or caprice.

But if Burke separates himself from the individualists as to the circumstances and formal conditions of the 'contract,' he does so still more decisively as to its scope and matter. To them the State is a partnership for merely material, and therefore limited, ends; a partnership, as Burke scornfully puts it, 'in things

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 417.

subservient only to the gross, animal existence' of its members. To him, on the contrary, it is a partnership for intellectual and moral ends; and these are ends which, from the nature of the case, cannot possibly be limited. 'It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection.' It would be impossible to define the ends of the State more nobly or more completely. It would be equally impossible to define them in a sense more absolutely opposed to the external and limited aims assumed by the individualists.

That Burke regards the State as existing for essentially moral and spiritual ends, that to him the functions of the State extend to the whole circle of man's activities, is thus beyond all possibility of doubt. Whether he takes the further step and asserts, as Rousseau had asserted before him, that the moral life of man—in all but its barest rudiments—is the creation of the State, that without the State there could be no guarantee for its continuance—this is by no means so clear; and it is probable that he himself would have found some difficulty in saying.

On the one hand, as we have seen, he was never able entirely to shake free from a rather crude form of the theory of Rights. He was 'far from denying in theory the *real* rights'—and this, in the context, manifestly means the private rights—of the individual. And there are moments in which he appears to speak of these as existing—and 'existing in much greater clearness and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection'—before civil society was formed.<sup>1</sup> Now such rights presuppose a whole network of moral relations. If they existed in the 'state of nature,' so also did the moral relations out of which they spring, and without which it is not possible even to conceive of them. And it would follow—if we are to hold Burke to the strict consequence of his words—that he assumes the moral sense and what is more, some kind of moral code to have existed, doubtless in a more or less rudimentary shape, before the State and 'in total independence of it.'<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand it will be acknowledged that such passages come as a shock to those who have carefully followed the general tenor of Burke's utterances; that they have the effect of pulling the reader up short, of making him ask how in the world they ever got there. And, faced as we are by many passages which bear a contrary sense—in particular, by the two passages above quoted—we are probably justified in saying that the 'appeal to abstract Right,' with all the consequences which it logically involves, is rather a controversial device than an expression of the author's deliberate and reasoned judgement. Even this admission,

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*

however, does not carry with it the answer of which we are immediately in search. It gives, in fact, no more than a negative result. It suffices to raise a strong probability against the conclusion that Burke conceived the moral life of man as existing, or having ever existed, 'in total independence' of civil society and the State. It does not suffice to show that he accepted the contrary conclusion, that he explicitly, or even consciously, recognised the former to be historically—still less speculatively and of necessity—dependent upon the latter. . . .

### III<sup>1</sup>

Yet that Burke was guilty of inconsistency can hardly be denied. It would not, doubtless, be fair to reckon too gravely against the consistency of Burke certain phrases about 'the rights of men' so 'cruelly violated in India by the English.' Such phrases are but lightly thrown out, and no serious argument is based upon their use. But when they appear in Burke's plea against the French Revolution, the case is widely different. There they are deliberately employed; and a grave charge of iniquity on the part of the National Assembly is founded on them. Certain personal claims are there asserted to be the 'real right' of every man; a right which no government may justly touch; a right which has as little to do with expediency as the 'supposed' political rights, which, just because they disregard expediency, Burke is never weary of denouncing.

It may perhaps be objected that, in thus speaking of certain personal rights as independent of expediency, Burke, however guilty of inconsistency in logic, was at least free from all charge of countenancing abuse, under the name of rights, in practice. It may be said that Burke is here at issue with his opponents on a merely speculative point; and that, in fact, such rights of the individual as he has in view, can never, under any circumstances, work ill to the community. But this is surely not the case.

The exact words of Burke are as follows:<sup>2</sup> 'Men have a right to the fruits of their industry, and to the means of making their industry fruitful. They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents, to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring; to instruction in life, and consolation in death.' If these words do not assert the right of every man 'in civil society' to

<sup>1</sup> [The two remaining extracts, the first on natural rights, the second the conclusion, are taken from an earlier (and the only completed) version of the chapter on Burke. See Preface.—ED.]

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, i. p. 403.

absolute control of his own property, inherited and acquired, to absolute freedom of worship, to absolute control over the education of his children, it becomes impossible to attach any meaning to them at all. It is as impossible to point to any State, ancient or modern, which has recognised these claims as absolute, which has not insisted on testing them by expediency; in other words, which has not denied them to be, in any legitimate sense of the term, a right. And the reason of this is obvious; such 'rights' of the individual may prove the extremest wrong to the community.

And, first, with respect to property. In how many ways does not the State trench upon the supposed right of a man to the fruits of his industry and to the means of making that industry fruitful? All interference with liberty of contract, all prohibition of slave-labour, all restrictions on the employment of women or children in work thought to be injurious for them, all confiscation of a traitor's possessions, all expropriation, whether compensated or no, even all taxation itself, are so many invasions of the 'rights of property.' Yet would Burke have dared to pronounce that any, or all, of these acts on the part of the State constituted a violation of the 'Rights of man'? On the principles which he asserts, in this and other passages of the *Reflections*, he was bound to do so. Indeed, not content with condemning such acts by implication, Burke, with all the zeal of a new convert, needlessly embarrasses himself by assuming—for he can hardly be said to make an attempt at proving—that the 'Rights of Property' belong no less to a corporation than to an individual.<sup>1</sup> 'Too much or too little,' he emphatically says in attacking the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, 'too much or too little are treason against property.' And the rest of his argument is directed to show that, when once a corporation had been despoiled, no individual could reckon his property secure.

Without basing either species of property upon what can strictly be called a right, it is easy to see—and the English nation has never, at a pinch, been slow to see—how far more drastic a measure it is to interfere with the possessions of an individual than with those of a corporation. The corporation exists solely for public ends, and at the creation of the State. If those ends are flagrantly disregarded, if the creature of the State becomes a danger to the power which created it, the State is surely not only at liberty, but under an obligation, to interfere and, if necessary, to undo the work which it had done. The property of the individual, on the other hand, exists primarily for individual ends; though resting, in the last resort, upon the sanction of the State, it does so in a far less obvious sense than the property of a corporation; and, as its operation is far more wide-reaching, so any interference with it

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. p. 420.



must lead to far more serious consequences in the way of unsettlement and alarm, as well as in the sense of grievance which it excites, than interference with a thing so comparatively rare as the property of a corporate body.

But to these considerations Burke was, for the moment, completely blind. If we are to believe him,<sup>1</sup> the English nation was as indignant at the disendowment of the monasteries in France as he and his Whig friends, a score of years earlier, had been at the disendowment of the Duke of Portland for the benefit of Sir James Lowther in England. And this assumed indignation of his countrymen against the 'spoliation' practised by the National Assembly of their neighbours he proceeds blandly to illustrate from the censure implied by the reversal, under the Restoration, of the Act which confiscated the property of Chapters during the Rebellion. He finds it convenient to forget that, only a century before the measure of 1643, England, by an Act never reversed, and on the whole still generally approved, had set the closest possible example to France of 1789. The Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 was far more obviously analogous to the parallel act of Burke's own day in France than was the confiscation of the Chapter-lands during the short-lived reaction against the tyranny of Laud. That Burke, therefore, avoided so carefully all mention of the former, while dwelling at such length upon the iniquities of the latter, must be admitted to show a strange want of candour. The real reason why the English nation, while on the whole approving the action of Henry VIII., undoubtedly condemned that of the Long Parliament, was not because any distinction was to be drawn between the two measures on the ground of Right—for, on this ground, what distinction is it possible to draw?—but because the one measure has been generally thought to thwart, while the other has no less generally been thought to further, the true interests of the community. But Burke's object being, at that moment, to excite passion, such an admission, however obvious and however much to be expected from his general principles, it was not, at that moment, for his convenience to make. For to have fallen back upon the modest argument from expediency would have been to rob these pages of the *Reflections* of all logic and—what, it is to be feared, was still more distasteful—to rob them of all pungency. It was little to prove that the eager legislators of France were unwise; Burke held a brief to demonstrate that they were fraudulent and wicked.

On the right to freedom in education and religion there is less need to speak at length. That Burke's sweeping principle

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. p. 438.

can be applied to either is indeed not to be admitted. But between the two there is an important difference. That any reasonable man should assert the right of the individual to educate his children as he pleases seems to us, at the present day, incredible. That any man, on the other hand, should deny the right of the individual to worship as he pleases would seem to many, perhaps to most, men impossible. The importance, not only to the child, but to the community at large, that each child should receive a rational education—an education, that is, of which the standard must, directly or indirectly, be fixed by the State and not by the parent—has become plainer to every civilised nation with every year for the last half-century. The importance, on the contrary, of leaving each man to judge and act for himself in matters of religion is recognised now by a hundred men for every man that held, and suffered for, toleration in the days of Burke.

Thus liberty of education (a liberty which must obviously include that of no education), so far from being regarded as a right, is now universally seen to be inexpedient and a wrong: while liberty of worship, in Burke's day hardly judged to be expedient, has now, in the judgement of most men, come to be recognised as, in the strictest sense of the term, a right. But, on a closer examination, even in matters of religion, freedom must be admitted to be no concern of right. It is true that, so far as religion is confined to inward belief, all interference would justly be regarded as monstrous. But when religion expresses itself in overt acts, when, as has happened more than once within recent experience, religion comes to be bound up with practices condemned as criminal, or when religion compels men to act as rebels, who will deny that the State may justly interfere? Who will venture to assert that rigorous punishment is a wrong? We thought it a duty to suppress the Thugs and the Suttee; we should not think it a violation of duty to prevent a Catholic from obeying the Pope, supposing that the Pope should issue orders in defiance of the laws of the land. It may be said that such repressive acts on the part of the State are not directed against religion, but against crime or against bad citizenship. But, if crime or bad citizenship have come to be part of religion in the mind of the worshipper, to draw such a distinction is simply idle. In the face of all argument, the person who suffers will persist in believing that he suffers for the sake not of his acts but of his creed. And, as it is indisputable that, save for his creed, he would not have been prompted to commit the act for which he suffers, he will always have the last word in the dispute. But if it is proper, even in one case, however rare, for the State to punish religious practice, what becomes of the right, which Burke claims for

each individual, to worship as he pleases? A right is universal, or it is nothing.

No doubt, save in extreme cases, it is in the last degree inexpedient for the State to interfere in matters of religion. And the reason is obvious. In the first place, all belief, and above all religious belief, is a matter of the heart. That being so, punishment, except for vindictive purposes, is either powerless, or powerful only to produce hypocrisy. The means employed have no relation to the end which they profess to seek. The end sought is to change the belief; the end attained is to leave the belief either unchanged, or possibly even strengthened, in the sufferer; and to others more seductive, from sympathy with his sufferings. In the second place, and in consequence, once embarked in such a contest, the State is only too likely—as those who framed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy are thought by some to have found to their cost—to be defeated. On both grounds, therefore, both from the certain severity of the struggle, as regards itself, and from the probable futility of the result, as regards the sufferers, it is manifestly expedient that, unless when the danger from non-interference is terrible and obvious, the State should refuse to interfere.

Thus, to deny that religious freedom is a matter of right is by no means to encourage the State in interference with religious liberty. The wisest statesman is he who will interfere the least. For practical purposes the champion of right and the wise champion of expediency will, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, be found to agree. It remains true that for speculative purposes their differences are not to be reconciled. The man who has urged unrestrained freedom for religious conviction as a right in one case is bound, by every principle of logic, to maintain it as a right in all. How then, after asserting the right of the French Catholics to maintain their religion unaltered even in financial organisation by the State, Burke could square it with his sense of honour to cry out for 'criminal justice' upon Paine, who had done nothing more than lay his political and religious creed before the English nation, it would be hard indeed to say. On the ground of expediency, the justice of Paine's prosecution may have been an arguable matter. But, in an evil hour for himself, Burke had emphatically excluded matters of conscience from the domain of expediency; for such matters he had emphatically claimed liberty as a right.

It was because Burke never reached the conception of progress that the principles of justice and expediency jostled each other uneasily in his system; that, in attempting to go beyond the

principle of expediency, he fell back, as we have seen, into the crudest form of the principle of right; that, in attempting to keep within the bounds of expediency, he condemned his own country, and that of his neighbours, to complete inertness and denied the necessity of the most necessary reforms. It was for this reason that, while moving under the flag of expediency, Burke failed to bring expediency into any rational relation—any relation that was not purely external—towards progress; and that, while moving under the flag of justice, he failed to bring justice into relation—if it were but an external relation—towards expediency. It was for this reason that, even when for the moment he had claimed a religious function for the State—a function which, we may boldly say, can only be justified on the theory that, for the nation as for the individual, truth and falsehood are concerns of life and death—Burke went on to close with the desperate doctrine that even superstition<sup>1</sup> is not to be discouraged, that it may give valuable aid to the policeman's truncheon, and that in fact—after the language of Gibbon—‘to the statesman all religions are equally useful.’ It was for this reason that he cast scorn upon the efforts of the Revolutionists in France<sup>2</sup>—efforts misdirected indeed in their means, but in their end no less heroic than they are memorable—to ‘engage for perfection’ and for truth. It was for this reason, finally, that his theory on the origin, as opposed to the functions, of the State was so curiously halting and inconsistent.

On this point it is necessary that we should pause for a moment. In other great political writers—notably in Hobbes, in Locke and in Rousseau—the question, ‘What was the origin of Society?’ plays, and rightly plays, a very important part. By Burke, on the other hand, the question is only treated in passing; and the answer to it is given not so much directly, as by implication. This, no doubt, is natural in a man whose first object was not speculative but practical. And, if Burke had altogether kept silence on the subject, no objection could have reasonably been raised. But the truth is that, in more than one passage, Burke does distinctly raise the question, ‘How came it that Society was formed?’ And, in more than one passage, the answer given is an answer that would have come more appropriately from Locke or Rousseau than from Burke.

Again and again, notably in the *Reflections* and in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, Burke casts in his lot unequivocally with the theory of a social contract. How little that theory squares with the doctrine of expediency, how closely it is bound up with the incompatible theory of rights it is hardly necessary to point out. The theory of contract, indeed, was simply devised to

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections*, i. p. 441.

<sup>2</sup> *Appeal*, i. p. 534.

save the existence of indefeasible rights, the birthright of each individual in every state, because guarded by express stipulation in the contract from which every state took its origin. Throughout it assumes the existence of those rights; and, but for the unquestioning assumption of those rights, it would never, in the face of all history and all probability, have won its way; perhaps it would never even have seen the light. This, however, is the theory which Burke, at moments, carelessly accepts. In accepting it, he forgets that no state, founded upon contract, could claim to be governed afterwards by expediency; that no state, whose beginning was laid in contract, could be completed under the guidance of perfection and of justice; that to no theory of contract is that countenance given by history which he, of all men, was bound most rigorously to exact.

That Burke should, even for the moment, have rested satisfied with an account, so ill-supported by history and so little in accordance with his own surest convictions, can only be set down to the hold which the doctrine of an original contract had laid upon the men of his own generation; a hold so strong that even the most cautious and the most sceptical were apt to submit to it without a murmur and without question. There were times, however, when the native strength of Burke asserted itself against an alien superstition. At such times, throwing to the winds the fables of a state of nature and a social contract, and reverting to the surer ground marked out by Aristotle and by Cicero, Burke asserted that the real parentage of society was to be sought not in contract, but in instinct; that man was essentially a social creature; that the real state of nature for man was not isolation but communion. Aristotle, in memorable words, had written: *φύσει ἄνθρωπος πολιτικὸν ζῶον*. 'Art is man's nature' is Burke's emphatic way of stating the same belief.

It was probably under the influence of the same thought that Burke wrote elsewhere: 'We must throw a veil over the beginnings of all government.' These characteristic words, no doubt, point partly to that sense of mystery or reverence, so habitual in Burke, and so sure a mark of greatness. They spring also, it must be admitted, from a more questionable desire, by no means faintly to be discerned in Burke, to surround the ruler with the hazy splendour of a religious halo. But, over and above all this, it is scarcely fanciful to see in them a warning how little the birth of any institution, above all of that institution which includes all others, will bear inspection; a reminder that the instinct from which society sprang, unlike the grandiose sense of freedom which had given birth to the supposed social contract, was a strange

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches on Hastings' Impeachment*, i. p. 60.

mixture of good and bad; a hint that brute force, as well as the instinct of fellowship, had played a larger part in the political training of past times than it is well for later generations to recall.

Here, then, once again our feet stand on firm ground. In this respect, as in so many others, the historical instinct of Burke presents a bright contrast to the somewhat thin reasonings of Locke, and to the feverish imaginations of Rousseau and of Hobbes. Standing on this ground, Burke had no need to cancel, with Hobbes, the rare moments occupied by liberty, or, with Locke and Rousseau, the long ages occupied by slavery, in the history of man. A strange blending of freedom and oppression in its origin, society has remained a strange blending of freedom and oppression in all its stages. And no theory, which refuses to recognise this, can claim for one moment to have grasped the secret of the tangled web which it proposes to unravel, or to have preserved the unity of that history which it professes to explain. It would indeed, as has been said already, be absurd to claim that Burke had that clear conception of progress which must be achieved before the unity of history is to be anything better than a blank and unsubstantial form. But in his more luminous remarks upon the origin, as in those upon the functions, of society he at least deserves the honour of having said nothing inconsistent with the ideas of unity and of progress; of having even anticipated those ideas, in a rudimentary shape; of having paved the way for a more complete realisation of them in an after time.

It had been the dominant tendency of Rousseau to put a ban both upon history and upon reason. It was the dominant tendency of Burke to restore both history and reason to their proper place. It is of course true that, throughout, Burke did no more than assume the idea of progress; that he did not realise its importance either for purposes of speculation, or for purposes of practice; that he made no attempt to bring it into harmony with those secondary conceptions on which, as was not unnatural in a practical statesman, he laid exaggerated stress. But in the most fruitful of those secondary conceptions, in the principle of expediency, he had grasped a thought which, even when qualified by his natural timidity, gave him, at least for such matters as concerned the dealings of England with her dependencies far and near, invaluable guidance; which should, logically, have been applied by him, and which both in his own and in later days has been applied by others, to the conduct of affairs within the borders of England herself; which, finally, was an anticipation and a reflection—if perhaps a reflection somewhat dim—of those ideas of unity and progress that have been the laborious conquest of the succeeding generations.

To these conquests Burke pointed the way. He did not him-

self enter the promised land; he even shrank from the vision of it which rose, at moments, before his inspired gaze. But, in spite of all his inconsistencies and all his fears, his faith in human reason was so great, his belief in the duty of following nature was so strong, that later enquirers might well be proud to reckon him among their ranks. 'I have done with this subject—that of the French Revolution—perhaps for ever,' he wrote at the close of the *Thoughts on French Affairs*.<sup>1</sup> 'It has given me many anxious moments for the two last years. If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it, the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it; and then they, who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.' Burke was prepared to sacrifice the apparent work of a lifetime in the cause of truth. And his humility had its reward. He saw farther than any of his contemporaries. He ranged himself, it is true, without hesitation among the uncompromising champions of the past. He declared inexpiable war against its uncompromising foes. But he had something of the temper, he had some earnest of the ideas, which, when once the smoke and roar of the battle were spent, would go to blend the unreasonable stubbornness of the past, and the no less unreasonable destructiveness of the present, in a wider, a more reasonable, and perhaps a more enduring, whole.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. 580.

## CHAPTER II

### KANT

IT was in Rousseau's works that the theory of Contract, or of individual Rights, appeared for the last time as a vital principle; and in the French Revolution that for the last time it wielded a fruitful influence. Since the explosion of 1789 that doctrine has indeed lingered on in the writings of some theorists; it has even asserted itself fitfully in the passing movements of the day. But the virtue is gone out of it. Nor, except in the form of Nihilism, is it likely again to play a dominant part in the history of the world. For the last century the clearest thinkers have based their arguments, the most powerful workers have based their action, upon a theory which starts rather from the Community than from the Individual. In the following chapters I propose to trace the stages by which this result has gradually been worked out; the stages by which the theory of individual Rights has gradually been replaced by the theory of collective duties.

The theory of individual Rights—and of that theory the doctrine of a Social Contract is but a particular form—broke down in two points. It had no basis in the records of the past, and it failed to account for the most obvious facts in the experience of the present. It was unhistorical, and it was unphilosophical. The task of any theory which should propose to take its place was thus clearly marked out in advance. It must contain nothing inconsistent with that increasing knowledge of primitive custom, which is among the chief intellectual conquests of the last century; and it must explain such elementary facts as the sovereignty of the Community, its right to tax and its right to punish offences.

These are the very barest requirements of any theory which, at the present day, can claim to stand for a moment. And, by the men of whom we are now to speak, these requirements were respected almost from the first. But, in the attempt to satisfy the most modest needs of the case, successive thinkers, as will be seen, have been led to extend their aim a great deal further; to include in their premisses much that had hitherto been regarded as lying



altogether apart from political enquiry; and, in consequence, to modify largely not only the scope but the nature and quality of their conclusions. This change of front—a change obviously of the last importance—will be found to depend on the admission of two cardinal principles. The thinkers of the last century have recognised that it is impossible to divorce Politics from Morals; and they have recognised the necessity of studying both Politics and Morals in the light of their historical development.

It was only by slow stages that so great a revolution in Political Philosophy was fully accomplished. The earlier stages of the controversy turned mainly on the connection between Politics and Morals. It was not till the spirit of patriotism was roused from its long sleep by the tyranny of Napoleon and the mean arts of the Holy Alliance that the appeal to History, and the consequent recognition of nationality as an essential element in the life of the man and the citizen, could be made with any chance of general acceptance.

The first blow in this, as in all other fields of modern Philosophy, was struck by Kant. And it is noticeable that the two treatises—*Zum ewigen Frieden* and *Die Rechtslehre*—which form his only contribution to the subject, were the last important work of his memorable life. None of the works by which Kant is now known appeared till he was near sixty: the *Rechtslehre* not until he was well over seventy.<sup>1</sup> Published in 1797, it bears on it, both in general scope and in details, the influence of the French Revolution. That influence, as has more than once been pointed out, is apparent, whether by action or by reaction, in the whole work of this extraordinary man. In one sense, that is the secret of his immense importance. There is probably no writer who so completely reflects both the immediate aims and the ultimate tendencies, often so curiously different from the immediate aims, of the moral and intellectual movement which culminated in the French Revolution.

In Kant, as in the Revolution, we may discern two opposite tendencies. On the one hand, he is destructive; *der alles Zermalmende*, as Heine called him; the great iconoclast. This side of Kant's genius appears most prominently in the rigid limits which

<sup>1</sup> Kant was born in 1724 and died in 1804. The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* was published in 1781, his two works on the Practical Reason respectively in 1785 and 1788, the *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (mainly dealing with the Philosophy of Art) in 1790, his work on Natural Religion in 1793, and the two treatises on Politics respectively in 1795 and 1797. The object of *Zum ewigen Frieden* is mainly practical, to plead for the abolition of war; but incidentally it touches the theory of Political Philosophy.

he places upon human reason, in the impassable barrier which he sets up between the world of appearances and the world of thought, and in his refusal to admit man, as a speculative being, beyond the world of appearance. At one stroke he sweeps away the whole web of theological deductions which had been spun by the 'dogmatic' philosophers of the eighteenth century. As Professor Wallace has said, his work, on this side, is a scientific rendering of the sarcasms scattered over the *Candide* of Voltaire. The German philosopher did thoroughly, and with systematic demonstration, what Voltaire did with literary graces. The German made a theory and a system of what (in Voltaire) was only 'a sally of criticism.'<sup>1</sup> Speculation, in Kant, is bidden, like the hero of Voltaire's romance, to put away its fine theories and to 'cultivate its garden.' That, on one side, is the moral of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. It was the moral also, in one aspect, of the French Revolution.

On the other hand, Kant has always—and with justice—been regarded as the father, in modern times, of idealist Philosophy. This element of his system, as is well known, comes to the surface mainly in his ethical writings. There, as Heine wittily said, the God whom he had banished from the world of speculation reappears with plenary inspiration over the world of action. The originative power, which Kant had withdrawn from reason as such, he restored to reason in the form of will. Now the admission of a creative faculty, involving the idea of God, in the will obviously threw an entirely fresh light upon what Kant had said about the essentially uncreative character of speculation. And it was the task in some degree of Kant's later writings, still more, however, the task of his successors, to reconcile the discrepancy between the two parts of his system; and to do so, not by levelling Kant's ethical theory down to his theory of knowledge, but by recasting his conception of Reason so as to bring it into line with his doctrine of the Will.

Thus, with all the limitations which he was careful to fix around it, the main upshot of Kant's doctrine was undoubtedly to recognise in human thought a dignity and creative power which

<sup>1</sup> Prolegomena to *The Logic of Hegel*, p. lii. Compare Hegel's own estimate: 'Kant und nach ihm Fichte dasjenige was Voltaire, dem von der Frömmel in die Empirie des gemeinen Lebens herabgezogenen Optimismus, sich auf eben den Standpunkt der Empirie stehend und also ganz consequent "ad hominem" entgegengesetzte, in philosophische Form brachten und systematisch erwiesen; wodurch denn jene Konsequenz ganz und gar verloren geht und die relative Wahrheit des Empirischen gegen Empirisches zu einer absoluten werden soll' (Hegel's *Werke*, i. pp. 143, 144).

a long line of thinkers, from Bacon and Hobbes down to Helvétius and Holbach, had emphatically denied it. And here too, in construction no less than in demolition, Kant may be said to reflect, though in a far nobler form, the tendencies of the French Revolution. Irreligious in appearance—irreligious, largely, in conscious aims—the Revolution, in spirit and in ultimate results, was fundamentally religious. The dominant party in the Convention was concerned, though in a blundering and often a grotesque way, not to destroy religion but to build it up on a firmer and a wider basis. And the general effect of the Revolution, both on those who welcomed it and on those who condemned it, was undoubtedly to deepen men's sense of reverence and to make a return either to the unthinking superstition or to the unthinking materialism of the eighteenth century well-nigh impossible. The self-respect of men was raised by the great passions—great, both for good and evil—which the Revolution called out; and with respect for themselves came also reverence for God. Danton and Marat might not be entirely admirable; but they at least suggested a more serious view of life, and a nobler conception of human character, than the Bubb Doddingtons and the Du Barris of the preceding generation.

Thus there are two points in which we are entitled to mark a special affinity between the doctrines of Kant and the principles which inspired, or the effects which sprang from, the Revolution. On the one hand, Kant's contention that, in speculation, the idea of God is purely negative—in his own words, that its proper use is not constructive but regulative—may fairly be called the counterpart of what Voltaire, and in some measure Rousseau also, had taught of the Supreme Being. To the German thinker, as to his French contemporaries, the conception of God was, on this side, little better than a blank. On the other hand, it was in the creative energy of the Will that the Revolution, like Kant, found both its true self and the God who, in speculation, had vanished almost to a shadow. The Revolution was the most signal act of will which had been seen in Europe since the Reformation.

When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared,  
And with that oath which smote earth, air and sea,  
Stamped her strong foot and said she would be free,

who could resist the conviction that there was something in the will of man which had not been accounted for by the subtleties of Hume or by the laborious commonplaces of Helvétius and Bentham? To understand what that 'something' precisely is, to discover what ideas of human Right and the divine nature it involves—this may be described as the task laid on Philosophy from Kant onwards to the present day.

The first distinct step in this enquiry, so far as Political Philosophy is concerned, was marked by the *Rechtslehre* of Kant. The form in which the book is cast tends no doubt to conceal its real originality. According to the universal practice of the German lecture-room, Kant follows step by step the course marked out by the Roman jurists. The result is doubly unfortunate. There is an obvious discrepancy between the new matter and the antiquated form into which it is violently thrust; and the cramped form not only obscures, but checks and stunts the free development of the philosopher's thought. Far as the *Rechtslehre* goes, it is difficult to believe that, but for the restrictions which Kant has imposed upon himself, it would not have carried us much further.

The Roman conception of Right was indeed singularly ill-adapted to receive the expansions which Kant desired to give it. It was juridical, and it was abstract. With all its liberality, with all its doctrines of equality, it was fast bound by principles which, once admitted, effectually closed the door to some of the most important questions that any system of Right may be expected to answer. Such were the purely juridical principles of legal personality and the equal validity of all contracts, whatever their content. Again, Roman Law was essentially abstract. For, being the 'living voice of reason,' it knew no distinctions of race nor of national custom; it was debarred from tracing the gradual development even of its native elements, much more of those which had come to it from without. It excluded the historical method, and with it the whole question of nationality as bearing upon ideas of Right, from the very beginning.

Fixed within so rigid a framework, it was hardly to be expected that Kant's treatise should altogether succeed in breaking through the conventions of tradition. Yet the wonder is rather that it should have accomplished so much than that it did not accomplish more. The question, 'What was the historical origin of the State?' is indeed summarily thrust aside by Kant as irrelevant and even dangerous.<sup>1</sup> Like Burke, he felt instinctively that it could readily become, as it became in the hands of Rousseau, an edged weapon against the established government of the day. And that was a result which a submissive, though persecuted, subject of a Prussian king could only contemplate with horror. But, on the other hand, Kant realises, as few modern thinkers have done, the inseparable bond between Political and Moral enquiry, and the

<sup>1</sup> 'Der Geschichtsurkunde dieses Mechanismus nachzuspüren ist vergeblich. Diese Nachforschung aber in der Absicht anzustellen, um allenfalls die jetzt bestehende Verfassung mit Gewalt abzuändern, ist sträflich' (*Rechtslehre*, § 52, p. 183). I quote throughout from Kirchmann's edition (Berlin, 1870).

necessity of pursuing the former under the guidance offered by the latter. It is significant that the *Rechtslehre* forms a section—though an independent section—of the *Metaphysik der Sitten*; a fact which brings out into clear relief both the strength and the weakness of Kant's position. Its strength, in that he felt Political Philosophy to be unintelligible except as treated in relation to Moral Philosophy. Its weakness, in that he should rather have included Moral Philosophy under Political, than Political under Moral. But, in spite of all shortcomings, the *Rechtslehre* marks an epoch in the history of political speculation. By binding Politics to Ethics, Kant gave an entirely fresh turn to the conception both of Right in general and of such subordinate notions as those of Property and of Contract in particular. He may take the order of his subject from the hands of the Roman jurists; but his treatment of each link, taken separately, is entirely his own.

There are four main questions with which the *Rechtslehre* is concerned. Two of them are questions of detail; the two others, of general principle. But even the two former inevitably raise the central problems round which all Political Philosophy must turn. It will be well first to examine Kant's views on the questions of detail; on the right of Property and the right of Punishment. This will prepare the way for his answer to the more general questions—'What is Right?' and 'In what sense can we speak of a Social Contract as the foundation of the State?' On all these questions Kant starts, more or less, from the doctrines laid down by Rousseau; on all of them his answers show considerable hesitation; but on all of them he arrives finally at a conclusion considerably modified from that of Rousseau. Throughout we are conscious that the author is feeling his way at every step. In this, as in all other branches of Philosophy, the work of Kant is essentially the work of a pioneer.

The tentative character of Kant's thought is clearly seen in his doctrine of Property. Broadly speaking, there are three views which it is possible to take of Property. The right of Property may be derived from the individual; or it may be derived from the community; or it may have no existence, save in custom and as the extremest form of wrong. The first view is that of the Roman jurists and of civilised society as it has stood from the decay of Feudal notions to the present day. The second view is that of Feudalism; it is the view also of Rousseau in the *Contrat Social*.<sup>1</sup> The third was the view familiar to Kant from the earlier treatise of Rousseau;<sup>2</sup> it is familiar to students of our own time from the

<sup>1</sup> *Contrat Social*, Book I. chap. ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*—the opening words of the second Part: 'Vous êtes perdus si vous oubliez que les fruits sont à tous, et que la terre n'est à personne' [*Pol. Writings*, i. 169].

still more trenchant phrase of Proudhon: 'La propriété c'est le vol.'

The last of these views is unequivocally rejected by Kant.<sup>1</sup> As between the first two he does not seem able definitely to choose. On one point, indeed, he is decided. He at once rejects the attempt to derive the right of Property from the individual, as such. He does not, that is, admit the supposed right of the individual to enjoy the *substance* of that on which he has spent his labour—the Roman jurists' doctrine of 'formation.'<sup>2</sup> For, in the first place, to jump from the enjoyment of the fruits of a single act of labour to the enjoyment in perpetuity of the material on which labour is put forth is a process for which there is no warrant in logic. And, in the second place, by this argument the whole question of right is completely begged. If I expend my labour on any given object, for the time being I appropriate that object to the exclusion of all other men. And the question at once arises: What right have I, even for a few hours or days, to appropriate that which, so far as nature goes, is common to all men? The right of Property is assumed by the mere attempt at 'formation,' long before it can be conferred by the completion of the task. Thus, in its extreme form, the individualist theory of Property is put aside by Kant as untenable.

There is, however, another form of that theory which, in one part of his treatise, Kant goes far to accept. This is the theory which derives Property from the abstract right of the individual to will, and therefore to appropriate, any object so long as he does not, either by will or act, do any direct injury to his neighbour. Yet even in this modified form—modified, because it admits the limitation which forbids any direct injury to our neighbour—Kant does not unreservedly adopt the individualist theory. The right that springs from appropriation, even under this restriction, is in his view only a 'provisional' and a derived right. It is a provisional right<sup>3</sup> because it requires the express sanction of those who are immediately interested; and that sanction can only be given when the community has organised itself into a fully constituted state, and when the reign of Right is definitely established.<sup>4</sup> Only when this has happened can the right, hitherto provisional and anticipatory, become absolute and peremptory. It is a derived right, because in no sense can the right of the individual be said to originate in himself.<sup>5</sup> It presupposes the right of mankind as a whole. In

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 2, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* § 17, pp. 77, 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* § 15, pp. 72-75.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* §§ 8, 9, 15, pp. 61-64, 72-75.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.* §§ 8, 13, 15: 'Das Vernunftmittel der Erwerbung aber kann nur in der Idee eines *a priori* vereinigten (nothwendig zu vereinigenden) Willens aller liegen, welche hier als unumgängliche Bedin-

Kant's view the only justification of Property lies in the necessities of man. If he did not, in some sense, appropriate the fruits of the earth and its living creatures, he would inevitably be starved. The right, however, which necessity engenders is a right, not of the individual, but of mankind at large. It is a right of mankind as against beasts and nature, not of one individual as against the rest.<sup>1</sup> It is only because mankind, as a whole, is incapable of exercising such a right—because the right, if it waited to operate until mankind had become physically one with one mouth and one pair of hands, would be entirely nugatory—that the individual is entitled to step into the place of the species, and to appropriate that which would otherwise perish (and, with it, mankind also) from the face of the earth. Thus the right of property is not originally the right of the individual as such, but of the race which he represents.<sup>2</sup> It only becomes the right of the individual when the state of nature passes into the civil state, and when the community has given its express sanction to what was previously nothing more than a provisional appropriation by the individual.

Even if Kant's statement of the case stopped here, it would result that he admits the right of individual property with considerable reserve and under important limitations. It is a right derived from, and at every stage qualified by, the right of the community. The question, however, inevitably arises whether, having gone so far in limiting the right of the individual, Kant was not, in consistency, bound to go yet further. Granted that the original right to appropriate portions of the earth, or its fruits, belongs to mankind—and here Kant's position seems to be unassailable—is it logical to pass directly from the largest possible total to the unit—from the *ultimum genus* to the individual—without taking into account the obvious intermediate stage, the

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gung stillschweigend vorausgesetzt wird; denn durch einseitigen Willen kann anderen eine Verbindlichkeit nicht auferlegt werden' (§ 15, pp. 61, 62, 70-75).

<sup>1</sup> And therefore, like all rights to things (as such), a right in a merely metaphorical sense: 'Es giebt also, eigentlich und buchstäblich verstanden, auch kein (direktes) Recht in einer Sache; sondern nur dasjenige wird so genannt, was jemandem gegen eine Person zukommt, die mit allen anderen (im bürgerlichen Zustande) im gemeinsamen Besitz ist' (*ib.* § 11, pp. 68, 69). Kant would hardly have accepted the phrase used in the text; but, on the whole, it gives his meaning more clearly than any other.

<sup>2</sup> It must not be supposed that Kant believed community of property to have existed, as a *fact*, in the primitive history of mankind. This he denounces as a fable (*Erdichtung*), distinguishing it repeatedly from that described in the text, which he defines as 'an idea, though a necessary idea' (*ib.* §§ 6, 10, 13, pp. 55-58, 65, 70, 71).

primitive Community or the State? It would surely have been more consistent, as well as in itself more satisfactory, if Kant had argued: 'Seeing that mankind, as a whole, is from the nature of the case disqualified from putting its right of property in force, the various communities which, go back as far as we like, we find scattered over the face of the earth, step into the place of mankind. At first provisionally and by anticipation, then (as soon as they have constituted themselves into regularly ordered States) absolutely and "peremptorily," they enter into the right of appropriating a certain portion of the earth's surface and of dividing it, or of sanctioning its division, among their component members. But the right, thus transferred from the community to the individual, may, subject to considerations of mere expediency, be at any time resumed by the community. The community may at any moment either modify the original distribution of its property or even take all back into its own hands, according as may seem most for the interest of its collective members.' Kant admits the part of the State in the constitution of property negatively and by a side-wind. Having done so, was he not bound to admit it positively and directly? He allows the State a sanction on individual property. Was he not bound to expand the sanction into a right, implied by, preceding and creating, that of the individual?

Doubtless what prevented him from taking this further step was the want of any tenable, or even any definite, theory as to the nature of the primitive Community.<sup>1</sup> The information as to the power of custom on primitive man, which the last fifty years have furnished so abundantly, was necessarily withheld from Kant. But in his theory of Property, as in other parts of his treatise on Right, it is hard not to believe that, if Kant had known but a tithe of what is now known on these matters, he would have eagerly welcomed it, as a means of bringing his theory not only into harmony with fact and record, but also into conformity with itself.

And in the later part of the *Rechtslehre* we find passages where, even without the aid of such knowledge, Kant goes far to take the step which historical study has made easy for his successors. It would, perhaps, not be fair to argue from his trenchant attack on the property of subordinate corporations, lay or clerical; from his indignant refusal to regard powers, which have fallen into the hands of such corporations through a series of historical accidents, as for one moment constituting rights.<sup>2</sup> For on no possible theory—save that of an alderman or an archbishop—can property in mortmain be regarded as having the same claim to respect as that

<sup>1</sup> See the passages referred to in the last note.

<sup>2</sup> *Rechtslehre*, I. Theil; *Anhang*, § 8, pp. 138-42.



of an individual owner. But there is a zest, an almost fierce delight, in Kant's thrusts at corporate property, which suggests that he had no consuming love for the indefeasible claims of private property in any shape. Still more noticeable are his remarks on the true character of the Sovereign.<sup>1</sup> In a strain almost impossible to reconcile with even the limited acknowledgement which he had given to the right of private property at an earlier stage of the treatise, Kant insists that the Sovereign is not only supreme magistrate but also, and yet more essentially, 'Lord of the land or, more precisely, supreme landowner,' and that from him 'all right of individuals to property is ultimately derived.'<sup>2</sup> This was, in fact, the conception that underlay the feudal idea of sovereignty and ownership. And Kant, who certainly cannot be suspected of a wish to revive the Feudal System in the letter, was yet clear-sighted enough to see the reasonableness and humanity of its spirit. In this, as in so much else, it seems tolerably clear that he was reaching forward to a doctrine which could only be fully formulated by his successors.

To define the exact relation of Kant's doctrine on Property to that of Rousseau would neither be profitable nor even possible. In his maturer works Rousseau does not discuss the subject except by the way. His earlier writings do not, so far as can be seen, represent his final verdict on the matter in question. On the whole, however, it would appear that here, as elsewhere, Kant has shaken himself free from any disposition to deify the individual to a far greater extent than Rousseau, even in his later writings, was ever able to do. Kant's doctrine rather reflects the exceptional pages of the *Contrat Social* than the general tenor of the work.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, II. Theil; *Allgemeine Anmerkungen* B, C, D, pp. 164-72. It is instructive to contrast these passages with Rousseau's assault on the Feudal System: 'système absurde s'il en fut jamais,' and in particular on the feudal conception of Sovereignty (*Contrat Social*, Book I. chaps. iv. and ix.).

<sup>2</sup> 'Da der Boden die oberste Bedingung ist, unter der allein es möglich ist äussere Sachen als das seine zu haben, deren möglicher Besitz und Gebrauch das erste erwerbliche Recht ausmacht, so wird von dem Souverain, als *Landesherrn*, besser als *Obereigenthümer* (*dominus territorii*) alles solche Recht abgeleitet werden müssen.' This, no doubt, is qualified considerably by words that follow: 'Dieses Obereigenthum ist aber nur eine Idee des bürgerlichen Vereins'; and 'Das Privateigenthum gehört nur dem Volk (und zwar nicht kollektiv, sondern distributiv genommen).' But nothing can do away with the force of the opening statement, especially when we consider its place in relation to the attack on the (Prussian) system of Domainlands, which immediately follows (*Rechtslehre* (as above), § B, p. 164).

<sup>3</sup> [Vaughan appears to have changed his view about this at a later date. See his Introduction to Rousseau's *Political Writings*, vol. i.

A like divergence is traceable in Kant's account of the right of Punishment. But in this case, from the fact that Rousseau had more completely broken away from the individualist doctrine, the relation between the two writers is decidedly closer. In examining Kant's views on Punishment, we are of necessity led to anticipate much of what he says on the intimately allied ideas of the Social Contract and the State. 'The mere idea of an organised State,' he writes, 'carries with it the conception of a right to punish, as inherent in the Sovereign power.'<sup>1</sup> 'Is this right,' he asks—at once plunging into the burning question of his own day—'is this right compatible with the idea of Contract, or is it not?'<sup>2</sup> This question had always had peculiar terrors for the advocates of the Social Contract. Punishment was the one obvious fact which, at least on first showing, was not to be reconciled with the idea of the State as a voluntary association. Locke had attempted to get over the difficulty by urging that a promise to submit to punishment, in certain well-defined cases, formed a part of the pledge taken by each individual at the moment of joining himself to a given community.<sup>3</sup> 'What right, then,' he asked in effect, 'has Antonio to murmur when Shylock, a Daniel come to judgement, exacts the pound of flesh thus freely promised?' Beccaria, accepting Locke's premiss—that punishment implies the previous consent of the patient—had, at least as regards the extreme form of punishment, rejected Locke's conclusion. 'No man,' he argued, 'can possibly will his own execution. Therefore capital punishment is a violation of the Social Contract and contrary to Right.'<sup>4</sup>

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p. 108, where he states that Rousseau 'recognises—and recognises more unequivocally than Kant was to do a generation later—that Property is only possible in and through the State.'—ED.]

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 5, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* II. Theil; *All. Ann.* E, pp. 172-80.

<sup>3</sup> It is, however, fair to say that Locke avoids any direct and formal discussion of the question. His view can only be inferred by piecing together various scattered passages. These are mostly to be found in *Civil Government*, Book II. chaps. vii. and viii., especially §§ 94, 116-19, 122. This evasion—which in itself is curiously significant—is rendered possible by Locke's persistent habit of treating the question of Punishment as inseparable from that of Property, 'Government,' according to him, 'having no other end but the preservation of Property' (*ib.* § 94).

<sup>4</sup> 'Qual può essere il diritto che si attribuiscono gli uomini di trucidare i loro simili? Non certamente quello da cui risultano la sovranità e le leggi. Esse non sono che una somma di minime porzioni della privata libertà di ciascuno. Esse rappresentano la volontà generale, che è l'aggregato delle particolari. Chi è mai colui che abbia voluto lasciare ad altri

It is with reference to Beccaria that Kant, in the first instance, approaches the question. It is quite true, he says, that no man can will his own execution. But it is equally true that no man—apart from the idea of moral Right—can will his own punishment in any form. To be logical, therefore, Beccaria ought to have laid his ban not only on capital punishment, but on all punishment whatsoever. Even had he done so, his argument would not have been substantially bettered. We must take our choice between the Social Contract—understood as Beccaria understood it—and the punishment of crime. The claims of both cannot stand together. So put, the question seemed to Kant hardly worth an answer. No ‘Communist-Anarchist’—Christian or otherwise—had yet arisen to question the necessity of legal punishment. If Beccaria’s conclusion was rightly drawn from his premisses, then the premisses must be wrong and the theory of a Social Contract—at least in that particular form—must be dismissed. It is the duty of the State to punish. It does so, however, not because it has taken a bond of fate for a succession of conscientious and contrite criminals, but because it is imperatively bound to maintain the supremacy of justice.<sup>1</sup> To uphold Right, by the punishment of wrong-doers as in all other matters, is the first law of the State.<sup>2</sup> Right, however, must be upheld for its own sake. And therefore to defend punishment in theory, or to apply it in practice, as a means of striking terror into other criminals, or even (primarily) as a means of reforming the criminal of the moment, is a gross breach of duty on the part of the State or of any individual who recognises his responsibility to the State.<sup>3</sup> It is to use men as mere instruments of statecraft, and to trample on the fundamental law of the practical reason which teaches that each individual is an end in himself. It is to destroy the principle on which the whole fabric of Right and of the State is built.

It is unnecessary to follow Kant into all his applications of this argument. Some of them—for instance, that which forbids the

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uomini l’arbitrio d’ucciderlo? Come mai nel minimo sacrificio della libertà di ciascuno vi può essere quello del massimo tra tutti i beni, la vita?’ (Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene*, § xvi., ed. of 1817 (Pavia), pp. 73, 74). The first edition of Beccaria’s treatise was published in 1764.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Strafe erleidet jemand nicht weil er sie, sondern weil er eine strafbare Handlung gewollt hat’ (*Rechtslehre*, II. Theil; *Allg. Anm.* E, p. 177).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Das Strafgesetz ist ein kategorischer Imperativ’ (*ib.* p. 173).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Der Mensch kann nie bloss als Mittel zu den Absichten einer anderen gehandhabt . . . werden’ (*ib.* p. 173). Compare a striking passage at the bottom of p. 175—a passage of which De Maistre’s famous apotheosis of the hangman is a crazy and sophistical parody.

State to use punishment with the primary object of reforming the criminal—are open to question.<sup>1</sup> One of them—that which forbids execution for infanticide, on the ground that the child born out of wedlock is born also out of the protection of the Law—is abhorrent.<sup>2</sup> But enough has been said to define his position; and we may pause once more to ask what is the relation of his teaching on the matter of punishment to that of Rousseau.

The passage containing Rousseau's account of Punishment is one of the most curious in the *Contrat Social*. He was too clear-sighted to rest satisfied with the flimsy doctrine of Locke. The general line of his argument debarred him from anticipating the essentially ethical doctrine of Kant. He is therefore driven to abandon the individualist theory, without finding his way to any other which can be regarded as seriously entitled to take its place. He pleads that the criminal, by the mere fact that he is such, has broken the social contract and is therefore to be hunted down as an outlaw and slain or banished as a public enemy.<sup>3</sup> Such an account betrays an obvious embarrassment in the mind of Rousseau. It is virtually an admission that the theory of a social contract breaks down in one of its most important links. The link supplied by Rousseau would have fitted better into the iron argument of Hobbes than into the flowery doctrine of the *Contrat Social*.<sup>4</sup> It is significant, however, in that it stands half way between the mechanical conception of the State, upheld by the champion of individual Rights, and the moral conception applied to political theory by Kant and his successors. As a moral agent, the State does not, in this branch of Rousseau's argument, get further than to be a good hater. But that, if we may judge by Dr. Johnson, is no mean part of the moralist's equipment. Rousseau applies the moral idea as a rod from without. It was the task of Kant to make it a vital principle working from within.

Quitting questions of detail, we may now pass to Kant's

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> 'Il doit être retranché (de l'État) par l'exil comme infracteur du pacte, ou par la mort comme ennemi public. . . . Quand on fait mourir le coupable, c'est moins comme citoyen que comme ennemi' (*Contrat Social*, Book II. chap. v.).

<sup>4</sup> The argument of Rousseau is indeed, under a less truculent form, much the same in substance as that put forward by Hobbes in *Leviathan*, chap. xxviii. To Rousseau, as to Hobbes, the authority which punishes is virtually in the 'state of nature' as regards the victim of punishment. All civil bonds between the two are broken. It is a war to the knife between the whole power of the State on the one hand and a solitary outcast on the other.

treatment of the central problems raised by Political Philosophy; and, first, to the comprehensive question, 'What is Right?'

The answer given to this question in the opening of Kant's treatise is conceived in the very spirit of Rousseau. 'The only original Right, belonging to each man in virtue of his humanity, is Freedom.<sup>1</sup> . . . Every action is in accordance with Right which enables the freedom of each man's will to subsist side by side with the freedom of every other man, according to an universal law: '<sup>2</sup> this is only a more technical way of expressing what Rousseau said when he defined the Social Contract as 'a form of association by which each man, uniting himself to all, nevertheless obeys none but himself and remains as free as he was before.'<sup>3</sup> And the fundamental identity of the two conceptions will be seen still more clearly when we turn to the successive declarations of the Rights of Man, which marked the various stages of the French Revolution. 'Liberty consists in the power to do anything which inflicts no injury on one's neighbour; thus the exercise of the natural rights of the individual has no bounds except those which are necessary to ensure the enjoyment of the same rights to all other members of the community.'<sup>4</sup> 'Liberty consists in doing anything which does not conflict with the rights of one's neighbour.'<sup>5</sup> The men who drew up these formulas, representing respectively the aims of 1789 and 1793, can hardly be suspected of drawing from Kant. Whether Constitutionalist or Girondist or Jacobin, they avowedly had their inspiration from Rousseau. Yet the more unreserved their appeal to Rousseau—and it is notorious that the men of 1793 were far more under his influence than the men of 1789—the closer is their conformity with the language of Kant.

Are we then to suppose that, when Kant spoke of Freedom as 'the only original Right of man' and proposed to limit that freedom in the case of each individual solely by the demand for an equal freedom on the part of all other individuals, he intended to assert that no action is contrary to Right which does not directly interfere with the formal freedom of one's neighbour? This is the inter-

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*: Einleitung, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*: Einleitung, § C, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Contrat Social*, Book I. chap. vi.

<sup>4</sup> 'La liberté consiste à pouvoir faire tout ce qui ne nuit pas à autrui: ainsi l'exercice des droits naturels de chaque homme n'a de bornes que celles qui assurent aux autres membres de la société la jouissance de ces mêmes droits' (*Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen* (1789); Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution*, iii. 54 (ed. 1847-62)).

<sup>5</sup> 'La liberté consiste à faire tout ce qui n'est pas contraire aux droits d'autrui' (*Declaration*, etc. (1793); *ib.* ix. 7).

pretation commonly fixed on the words of Rousseau;<sup>1</sup> and it would be the natural deduction from the language to be found in the earlier treatise of Kant. In *Zum ewigen Frieden* Kant draws a distinction between Laws imperative and Laws permissive, adding a hint that the Laws with which we are concerned in matters of Political Right belong largely to the latter class.<sup>2</sup> This hint was seized on by Fichte<sup>3</sup> in support of his contention that between Right in the moral and Right in the political sense there is an absolute distinction; and that, while the laws flowing from the former are always imperative, those flowing from the latter can never be anything more than permissive; in other words, that the idea of duty is entirely banished from the field of political Right.<sup>4</sup> There can be little doubt that Fichte puts a strain upon Kant's language which it will not naturally bear. But there can be equally little doubt that, in the passage under consideration, Kant was obscurely feeling after the doctrine which Fichte held consciously and with emphasis. This amounts to saying that, at the time when he wrote *Zum ewigen Frieden*, Kant was more disposed to separate morals from Politics—to regard Right as independent of ethical determinations—than he afterwards became. As to his meaning in the *Rechtslehre* there can be no reasonable dispute. In that treatise the doctrine of the permissive nature of Right is silently dropped: the law of Right is definitely stated to be a special branch of the moral Law: its maxims, like the maxims of the moral Law, are nothing if not imperative and universal; and it is of their essence to be enforced, when necessary, by compulsion.<sup>5</sup>

It is, in fact, tolerably clear that Kant intended to give a wide interpretation to that part of his definition which deals with the limits imposed by the idea of Right upon the absolute freedom of

<sup>1</sup> It may be doubted, however, whether Rousseau would have accepted this construction of his words. It was certainly not the sense given to them by his lineal representatives, the Jacobins, who prided themselves on adding to the negative definition of Liberty proposed by the Girondins, the significant words: 'La liberté a pour règle la justice' (*ib.* ix. 7).

<sup>2</sup> *Zum ewigen Frieden*: Kant's *Werke* (ed. Hartenstein), v. 419 (note).

<sup>3</sup> In his *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, of which all except the Preface seems to have been written by 1795, but which was not published till 1796 (the year following the publication of *Zum ewigen Frieden*).

<sup>4</sup> 'Ein Recht ist offenbar etwas, dessen man sich bedienen kann, oder auch nicht; es erfolgt sonach aus einem bloss erlaubenden Gesetze . . . Es lässt sich schlechterdings nicht einsehen, wie aus dem unbedingt gebietenden . . . Sittengesetze ein Erlaubnisgesetz sollte abgeleitet werden können' (Fichte's *Werke*, iii. p. 13).

<sup>5</sup> *Rechtslehre: Einleitung in die Metaphysik der Sitten*, iii. pp. 18-20; iv. pp. 24-28. *Einleitung in die Rechtslehre*, §§ C, D, pp. 31, 32 (Kant's *Werke*, vol. v.).

the individual.<sup>1</sup> He meant the restriction on individual freedom to be read in the light of the moral Law: he did not mean that the freedom of others is to be respected merely in form, but in matter and in substance. It is true that he does not work out this conception in detail. It is even true that he obscures it by an attempt to confine the scope of Right to those cases in which it can be enforced by compulsion. But the very words in which he does this bear witness to the impossibility of drawing a rigid line between Right in the political and Right in the moral sense. '*Act according to the idea of Right*' is a demand made on me by Ethics';<sup>2</sup> but it is a demand which lies at the base of every action in the field of Politics no less than in the field of Morals; a demand without which no State could hold together for an instant; and this is admitted by Kant when he puts it, ethical though it may be, in the forefront of his treatise on Politics.

For convenience' sake we may distinguish between Ethics and Politics—between the sphere of the individual, as such, and his sphere as member of a community. But, essentially, the two spheres are inseparable; each can only be understood in its relation to the other. In other words, a Right in Politics is not merely self-regarding; it is not something which I may enforce or no, according to my individual caprice, according to the more or less of my self-assertion. Like 'right' in Ethics, it is necessarily correlative to 'wrong.' It carries with it the idea of duty: duty to myself and to the State collectively on the one hand; duty to other individual members of the State upon the other hand. It follows that no political Right is solely a privilege. Even as regards myself, it is also a burden and an obligation; an obligation which, under certain circumstances, I may be punished for violating or neglecting. To have recognised this in however hesitating a way, and to have incorporated the recognition far more completely into the main body of his work than Rousseau, is among the chief services of Kant in political speculation.

We now pass to Kant's treatment of the State on its constitutional side. Here again, as in the account of Property, we are met on the threshold by the theory of a Social Contract. And here again, as in all other branches of the subject, the transitional position of Kant is clearly marked. By what he had said on Punishment, Kant was logically bound to find the basis of constitutional Right anywhere rather than in contract. But the prevailing fashion of his time was too strong for him. He does

<sup>1</sup> 'Also ist das allgemeine Rechtsgesetz: Handle äusserlich so, dass der freie Gebrauch deiner Willkür mit der Freiheit von jedermann nach einem allgemeinen Gesetze zusammen bestehen könne' (*Rechtslehre*, p. 31).

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 31.

not definitely accept the Social Contract; but neither does he reject it altogether. On the one hand, he feels instinctively that to base government upon the consent of the governed, pure and simple, is to hand over the fabric of justice and order to caprice and possibly to anarchy. On the other hand, the freedom of the individual, morally as well as materially, seems to him to demand the assumption of a freely accepted contract. It is clearly a conflict in his mind between the claims of justice and the claims of individual freedom. He does not see his way fully to reconcile the two. He is too honest—and, we may add, too humane—to sacrifice either.

It is curious to watch the various stages of this oscillation. In one passage the theory of a Contract is treated as a vain, and even a false, assumption. 'To search for the historical records by which the mechanism of the State was established is an empty task. However far we go back, it is never possible to reach the moment when Civil Society had an absolute beginning. Savage tribes do not draw up an instrument to record their submission to the Law; and from the very nature of the case we may infer that men must have begun by using force.'<sup>1</sup> In sharp contrast with this stands the following passage from an earlier part of the treatise: 'The Act by which the People constitutes itself into a State—or rather, the mere idea without which we are unable to conceive the rightfulness of such an association—is the original Contract. In virtue of this all and sundry in the given People surrender their external freedom, in order at once to resume it as members of a common organism—that is, of the People regarded as a State. It cannot be said that the individual in such a State has sacrificed a *part* of his native, external freedom to secure a certain end. On the contrary, he has *entirely* abandoned his wild, lawless freedom, in order to find it again unimpaired in a state of dependence according to Law; that is, in a state of Right. For this dependence is the work of his own will, acting as lawgiver.'<sup>2</sup> Half-way between these stands the following, the last passage that need be cited. 'Whether an actual Contract of subjection to the ruler was as a fact the first step; or whether Force was the first step and Law only came in at a later stage . . .; these are for the People, which already stands under the protection of civil Law, quite empty subtleties, and for the State full of danger.'<sup>3</sup>

In the first of these passages, it will be observed, Contract, as an historical fact, is unequivocally rejected. In the second it is accepted as a mere idea, though a necessary idea. In the third it is pronounced to be historically problematical and politically

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 52, p. 183. Compare p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* § 47, pp. 154, 155.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*: *Allg. Anm. A*, p. 158. Compare § 52, p. 153.



dangerous. A variation between different moments of the writer's mind as great as could be wished.

Apart, however, from inconsistency, these passages and others which stand in close connection with them suggest various criticisms. In the first place, if the Social Contract is, to say the least, doubtful as a historical fact, how can it be valid as a philosophical idea? Can any theory of Right be satisfactory which passively disregards, even if it does not run actively counter to, the historical development of the State? Kant's treatment of the question brings him face to face with an awkward dilemma. If the Social Contract is necessary as an idea—if it presents the only form in which we can conceive of Right being realised—then it is no merely 'empty subtlety' but a matter of life and death for each People to ask whether the constitution of its own State is consistent with that idea or no. If it should prove not consistent, then it is not only the right, but the plain duty of the People never to rest until the existing Constitution is overthrown, and one more reasonable and more righteous set up in its place. This, the inference of Rousseau, is, on the premisses which Kant holds in common with Rousseau, the only possible conclusion. It is a conclusion, however, which Kant again and again explicitly rejects.

But a yet more serious difficulty remains behind. Kant's argument raises the whole question of the method of political enquiry. The implication throughout the *Rechtslehre* is that Political Philosophy is entirely *a priori*, entirely independent of experience, in its procedure. That there is an *a priori* element, an element which precedes all experience, in the conceptions of political Right as in those of moral right and of speculative reason, is a truth of the first importance; and it is one of Kant's chief services to Philosophy to have brought out this fact with a force and cogency which it would be difficult to surpass. And so far as the express words of the *Rechtslehre* go, no fault is to be found with his statement of it. 'A purely empirical Philosophy of Right, like the wooden head in the fable of Phaedrus, is a head which may be beautiful, but which unfortunately has no brain.'<sup>1</sup> But to thrust aside all enquiry into the historical development of Right is to go far beyond the rejection of a 'purely empirical' method. It amounts to saying that Experience is not only not the whole, but that it does not form the smallest fractional part of our idea of Right. It leaves us to construct the whole fabric of Right out of the elementary idea of the Will and of Justice; out of such conceptions as that of the inalienable freedom of the will, and such abstract commands as 'Be just to all mankind.' Now these conceptions and 'categorical imperatives' are clearly, in themselves, an absolute blank.

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, Einleitung, § B, p. 31.

It is only by experience, and the practical instinct born of experience, that they win any definite content. Every thoughtful reader of Kant's ethical writings has probably felt the failure of Kant's attempt to deduce the specific duties of practical conduct from the abstract idea of Duty, eked out by the law of contradiction. Precisely the same fallacy underlies his total rejection of experience and of the historical method, from the theory of Political Right.

This fundamental error accounts for much that is unsatisfactory in the application of Kant's constitutional doctrine. Kant, as we have seen, regards Right as a fixed quantity: as a conception which, owing nothing to experience, is not capable of being expanded by experience. It is a natural, though not perhaps a necessary, consequence of this that, in his whole view of the Constitution, there is something rigid and unelastic. Adopting from Montesquieu the doctrine of a strict division of powers—legislative, executive and judicial—he marks off the functions of each so jealously from the others as to render any common action well-nigh impossible. In his terror of revolution he preaches a stagnation which even Burke would have regarded as excessive.<sup>1</sup> Nor has his detailed application of that doctrine even the negative merit of consistency. On one page he admits that the King, in certain circumstances, may rightfully be deposed by the Legislature.<sup>2</sup> Two pages later he expressly cancels that admission and asserts that 'the Constitution may contain no article empowering' the Legislature, 'in case the Constitution is violated by the Chief Magistrate, to resist him and to place a check upon his actions.'<sup>3</sup> Still more violently does Kant shrink from all forcible methods of resistance or reform. 'Rebellion, when a Constitution is already established, is the overthrow of all Civil Right, and consequently of all Right. It is not a change of the Civil Constitution, but its dissolution. Under these circumstances, the transition to a better Constitution is not a transformation but an entirely new birth, which demends a new social Contract on which the previous Contract, now abolished, has no influence.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, §§ 43-49, and *Allg. Anm.* A, pp. 149-64.

<sup>2</sup> 'Der Gesetzgeber kann dem Regent auch seine Gewalt nehmen, ihn absetzen, oder seine Verwaltung reformiren, aber ihn nicht strafen: denn das wäre wiederum ein Akt der ausübenden Gewalt' (*Rechtslehre*, § 49, p. 156).

<sup>3</sup> 'Ja es kann auch selbst in der Konstitution kein Artikel enthalten sein, der es einer Gewalt im Staate möglich machte, sich, im Fall der Übertretung der Konstitutionalgesetze durch den obersten Befehlshaber, ihm zu widersetzen mithin ihn einzuschrauben' (*ib.*: *Allg. Anm.* A, p. 159).

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* § 52, p. 183.

The closing sentence of the last passage points to a more fruitful conception of political Right. It seems to recognise an ultimate power, and apparently an ultimate Right, in the People to seize by force what it has failed to win by constitutional means. Revolution takes the place of those well-balanced (and futile) Petitions (*Gravamina*) which had hitherto formed Kant's one notion of political warfare.<sup>1</sup> We are almost led to suspect Kant of having trifled with his readers, and of nursing an esoteric sympathy with Revolution. The suspicion is deepened by the remarkable passage which immediately follows and which closes this section of the *Rechtslehre*. 'The various forms of the State are only the dead letter of the original Law of Civil life. They may therefore remain so long as they are regarded as belonging to the machinery of the Constitution and from long habit (a merely subjective ground) are reckoned necessary. But the *spirit* of the original Contract carries with it an obligation on the constituent Power to bring the *form* of the Government into harmony with its idea. And, if this cannot be done all at once, a gradual and unbroken series of changes must be carried on, so that the form of Government, in practical working, may be brought into accord with the only rightful Constitution, namely the Republican; and the old forms, which have a merely empirical and statutory value and which only served to secure the obedient submission of the People, may eventually be resolved into the original and rational forms; for those are the only forms capable of making Freedom the principle, or rather the condition, of all such compulsion as is necessary to a rightful Constitution in the strict sense of the idea of the State. And the ultimate goal will be the establishment of this (original and rational) form, even according to the letter. This is the one permanent form of Constitution, in which the Law governs by its own force and does not depend on any individual person. This is the final goal of all public Right; the condition under which alone Right can be said to have an absolute and peremptory existence. Till this is reached, Civil Society can be credited only with a provisional and private Right.'<sup>2</sup>

Inconsistent with much that has gone before, this passage may be. But in itself, and above all as coming from so cautious a man as Kant, it is surely most remarkable. And that for two reasons. It changes the whole texture of Kant's doctrine concerning Right; and it opens the door for the conception of progress, and consequently for the application of the historical method to Political Philosophy. It sweeps aside, firstly, at one blow, all the 'mechanism' in which the organic life of the Community had been choked and thwarted. For an elaborate system of

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 52, *Allg. Anm.* A, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 52, p. 184.

checks and counter-checks it substitutes the free sovereignty of the collective nation.<sup>1</sup> It recognises that all constitutional forms, and all the contracts—real or imaginary—by which they are supported are in themselves nothing; that their only function is to protect and foster the upward growth of a national sense of responsibility towards the ideal of justice and of Right, which is to be found only in a ‘pure Republic.’

It follows, secondly—though Kant himself would hardly have been prepared to admit it—that the whole doctrine of Contract is implicitly abandoned. For, if the one essential thing in the State is its inward life and growth—if all the rest is mere scaffolding and machinery—why should any man trouble himself to ask what contracts were made at its foundation, and how they have been kept? So long as Contract was understood in its literal sense—so long as it was intended to imply (which it was with Hobbes and to some extent with Rousseau), that the sense of justice and obligation first took its rise in men with the birth of a social order, that is at a given moment of human history—so long, however untenable it may have been, the theory which based the State on a Social Contract had at least a definite and intelligible meaning. But, directly the sense of justice comes to be conceived as either prior to the formation of the State or rather as inseparable from it—the State, in its turn, being regarded as, in some form or other (more or less rudimentary), absolutely inseparable from the very nature and existence of man—then the idea of Contract becomes a mere metaphor and—what is worse—a misleading metaphor.

Now it is precisely in these two ways that Kant successively—and so far without serious inconsistency—conceives of justice. In one sense (the more rudimentary), Society and the idea of justice are to him coeval with man. We cannot, except by an avowed abstraction, conceive of man except in some form of society and guided by some idea of justice. In another sense (the more developed and articulated, in what can more strictly be called the State), Society is posterior to the individual and to the idea of justice: it is their more or less deliberate creation. This Kant expresses by saying that the true antithesis is not between

<sup>1</sup> In a significant addition to the main text Kant enforces his position by an illustration from the history of the French Revolution. The mere summoning of the States General constituted, he argues, a complete surrender of the Sovereignty by Louis XVI. into the hands of the nation. It was a step which no Contract, express or understood, could ever rightfully undo. For, when once a nation has recovered the sovereignty which belonged to it of right from the beginning, it would be guilty of high treason against its members if it should again surrender the sovereignty to its former holders (*Rechtslehre*, § 52, p. 185)

the state of nature and the social state, but between the state of nature and the Civil Community.<sup>1</sup> This distinction gives the key to the strange difference, compatible, however, with an equally strange resemblance, between the view of Kant and that of Rousseau. To Rousseau the 'state of nature' was essentially antisocial; to Kant it is essentially social. It is, in fact, a form, though a lax and undeveloped form, of the Civil Community. The idea of Right which it embodies may be, in Kant's language, a provisional and not an absolute idea. But that is a misfortune which it shares with the more rudimentary, as opposed to the one perfect and final form of the State itself.

Now it is clear that this change in the sense of the 'state of nature' involves a corresponding change in the sense of the 'Social Contract.' The Social Contract is no longer the act which puts an end to the isolation of the individual and for the first time brings him within the reach of social ties, of obligation and of justice. It is at most the act which, at a given historical moment, constituted the various Communities, 'with fixed and definite laws securing the rights of their members,' which we call States. Even in this sense—the 'original contract' of the document which called William of Orange to the English throne—it is admitted by Kant to be a 'mere idea,' though a 'necessary' idea. In other words, it is a mere metaphor. It is only an imaginative way of expressing the two conditions on which every form of society must depend; the satisfaction of justice and the protection of individual liberty. But it is doubly misleading. Even apart from its use by Hobbes and Rousseau, the phrase 'Social Contract' would naturally suggest something fixed and rigid, a law of the Medes and Persians which, whatever may be done by wrong and violence, can never in right and honour be altered to the extent of a single jot or tittle.<sup>2</sup> And, in view of their writings, this meaning, natural in itself, becomes nothing less than inevitable. No writer, once involved in so ambiguous a terminology, was likely to avoid the snare of passing unconsciously from the less to the more rigid of its meanings. Kant himself, accurate as he is, and sure-footed above all philosophers save Aristotle, suffers from a bad choice of terms. In spite of

<sup>1</sup> 'Dem Naturzustande ist nicht der gesellschaftliche, sondern der bürgerliche entgegengesetzt' (*Rechtslehre*, Einleitung, p. 45).

<sup>2</sup> Hence the astounding sophistries to be found in Fichte's *Beiträge*, pp. 108, etc. Fichte perceives that the supposed *Social Contract* must stand or fall with the contracts of ordinary life. And he can only prove that the Social Contract is not eternally binding by proving that the sanctity of all contracts is a superstition; that either party is at liberty to break any contract, without the consent of the other.

the idealist strain in his temper, in spite of the instinct which perpetually prompted him to a freer and wider range of thought, he is still bound by the shackles which he had inherited from Locke and Rousseau.

It is, however, a thankless task to criticise the short-comings of so great a thinker as Kant. And, before leaving the *Rechtslehre*, it will be well to review its main doctrines in the light of the conclusions which Kant hints, if he does not fully or explicitly state them, in its closing pages.

The sense of Right, in Kant's view, is inseparable from the very nature of man. The individual is inconceivable except in relation to other individuals; and the mere fact of that relation constitutes duties which are as imperative, and consequently as independent of his personal desires and caprices, as his duty towards himself. The idea of Right, in its most elementary form, is indeed no more than the idea of my individual freedom; the sense that I am my own master, and that no other man is entitled to interfere with my acts. But the sense that I am a free agent necessarily carries with it a corresponding sense that all other men are equally free. If they are not entitled to interfere with my acts, no more am I entitled to interfere with theirs. In case any such interference is attempted, on one side or the other, it may justly be prevented and punished. Right would be a mockery, if it could not be enforced by compulsion and punishment. Thus the freedom, to which I have a right, is not an absolute and unqualified freedom. It is not the power of satisfying every desire, reasonable or unreasonable, which I may conceive. In one word, it is not license. It is a freedom qualified by respect for others, and controlled by universal laws. If freedom is the definition of Right, no less is Right the definition of freedom.

This double law—on the one hand expanding Right into freedom, on the other hand controlling freedom by Right—has a binding force altogether apart from, and previous to, any positive Code which may be framed to expound, or any regular jurisdiction which may be established to enforce, it. It is no less valid in the 'state of nature' than in the civil community. And that, on several grounds. Our reason demands that the Code of Right in any given community should not be an arbitrary convention, but an embodiment (more or less complete) of the Right which exists altogether apart from any individual man or any particular State. Again, the laws of all Civil Communities are framed and accepted solely for the purpose of securing certain given ends. If these were not already recognised as ends at the moment of association, obviously no laws could be framed to secure them. Positive Law presupposes the existence, in a vague and rudimentary form, of

certain primitive rights; for instance, the right of Property.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, if the sense of obligation and of the sanctity of promises did not exist when the Social Contract was made, how could those who made it come to suppose that it would be generally observed?<sup>2</sup>

Thus, before Right received a formal sanction from the Social Contract, it already operated among the loosely compacted Communities, scattered over the face of the earth. It was then a provisional Right. By the Social Contract it was made absolute and peremptory. It may be objected, says Kant, that every member of such a community will not see the necessity of converting Right provisional into Right peremptory and absolute. In that case, he answers, the majority has the right to compel his concurrence.<sup>3</sup> A sufficiently startling admission; for it destroys at one instant the doctrine of individual consent and the theory of Contract, which is nothing if not an expression of that doctrine.

However, the theory of Contract, once admitted, is bound to assert itself at all subsequent stages of political existence. It has, as we have seen, a double significance. It is at once a moral covenant and a constitutional compact. In its moral aspect, it pledges those who join in it to surrender their lawless freedom—their individual caprice—to find a higher freedom—their true selves—in obedience to the Law. It is the identification of the individual will with the universal law of right. In its constitutional aspect, it frames a certain form of government which, being instituted by the general will, is from that moment binding both on all who administer it and all to whom it is administered. No substantial alteration of it, whether by radical reform or by revolution, is henceforth admissible; for this would be a breach of the covenant on which not only the particular form of government but also all public Right ultimately depends.<sup>4</sup> Yet, seeing that no historical form of government is completely adequate to the idea expressed in the Social Contract—seeing that no Law, hitherto known, is at once universally valid and universally recognised as such (universal, that is, both in its content and in its extent) it is the duty of the governor gradually and tentatively to revise the machinery of the constitution with the aim of eventually bringing the letter of the Law into conformity with its spirit.<sup>5</sup> When that goal is reached, the supremacy of the Law will at length be recognised without abatement and without exception. The Law will be a

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, §§ 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* § 19.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ein Recht (muss angenommen werden) jedermann, mit dem wir irgend auf eine Art in Verkehr kommen könnten, zu nöthigen mit uns in eine Verfassung zusammenzutreten, worin jenes gesichert werden kann' (*ib.* § 9, p. 63; compare § 8, p. 62).

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* § 52, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.* pp. 183, 184.

perfect embodiment of the national will, and the national will have completely identified itself with the idea of Right.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, starting from premisses in part the same as Rousseau's, Kant arrives at something entirely different from Rousseau's conclusion. The Social Contract is kept, and kept (as with Rousseau) on the ground that no man can rightfully be compelled to obey a law which he has not accepted of his own accord. But it is kept as a 'mere idea'; it is kept with a wide opening for compulsion; and it appears at an altogether different stage of social development. It does not mark the passage from the complete isolation of the individual to his union with other individuals in society, but from a less to a more fully articulated form of social life; from a society resting on custom and tradition to a society based on written law or, at the very least, on oral law universally known and accepted.

Yet more important is Kant's divergence from Rousseau in his conception of the individual will. Throughout Rousseau's writings—bating those exceptional passages to which attention has repeatedly been called—the implication is that, by instinct and nature, the will of man is wholly good. It is only society or evil institutions that have perverted and corrupted it. Kant is not so short-sighted as to meet this doctrine with a flat denial. There is no need, he says, to suppose that the will of man is wholly bad. But the very idea of a Social Contract, the mere assertion that some outward rule of Right is necessary to secure justice, is an admission that oppression is possible, and consequently that the will of man is not invariably good.<sup>2</sup> In fact, so far from being an age of innocence, the 'state of nature' is to Kant the age in which man is at his worst, and his sense of justice at its weakest. The history of mankind is a record of the stages by which the common sense of justice is gradually both strengthened and developed, and by which the higher self is disengaged from the instinctive or natural self of the individual. To Rousseau it is a story of progressive degeneration.<sup>3</sup>

This fundamental difference in his conception of the natural man led Kant to depart widely, and should have led him to depart more widely yet, from the conclusions of Rousseau. If the will of the individual is naturally and necessarily good then Rousseau was right in holding that justice may always be obtained by counting heads.<sup>4</sup> In that case, general consent is an infallible guide to

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 52, pp. 184, 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* § 44, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> [Vaughan would probably have modified this statement at a later date. Reference should be made to the Introduction to Rousseau's *Political Writings*, especially the summary on pp. 114-15.—Ed.]

<sup>4</sup> [But see the Introduction to Rousseau's *Political Writings*, p. 66, where it is recognised that we must 'clear Rousseau from the extravagance,



Right; the voice of the people is always the voice of God. The innocence of man, if it does not rather prove that all government is superfluous, leads logically to the Social Contract as the only possible basis of the State. But, if the will of the individual is liable to be evil, then neither his consent nor his dissent can count for anything when Right and justice are in question. They may serve to secure or to defeat the triumph of Right; they can never serve to show on which side the cause of Right is to be found. The authority of a government may rest upon the mere force of habit. It may even have been established, in the first instance, by violence. But so long as it stands for justice, so long as it educates its citizens by successfully appealing from their lower to their higher selves, so long its right cannot be impeached; and the absence of an universal vote of confidence, whether at its foundation or at any other time, is absolutely irrelevant to its claims.

This is admitted by Kant himself just far enough to destroy his consistency in one direction, but not far enough to establish it in the other. 'We have a right,' he says, 'to compel every man, with whom we come into any kind of intercourse, to join us in forming a Constitution which shall assure us the possession of our property.'<sup>1</sup> If the sanctity of individual freedom is violated at the moment in which of all others, on Kant's showing, it ought most to be respected, why, at any previous or subsequent stage of Kant's theory, should it be represented as inviolable? 'The whole community suffers tyranny when the rights of one member are disregarded,' wrote the Revolutionists of 1793. And, on the principles of Rousseau—which in this matter were the principles also of Kant—their word could not be gainsaid. How was it that Kant did not see the necessity of choosing once and for all between two contradictory theories? How was it that he did not perceive the absolute sanctity of the individual to be irreconcilable with the absolute supremacy of justice?

The answer to this question will show us precisely the points in which Kant's theory needed to be corrected and supplemented, and so lead us to the various stages of the advance slowly made by his successors. Speaking logically, we may say that Kant's theory broke down because he failed to distinguish clearly between two entirely different senses of the word 'freedom.' He could never make up his mind whether he meant to plead for freedom in the purely formal, or for freedom in the substantial, sense; for freedom as the mere caprice of the individual, or for freedom as scope for the

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sometimes attributed to him, of holding that whatever the majority wills is always sure to be just.'—ED.]

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtslehre*, § 9, p. 63.

development of his higher faculties. In the language more specially appropriate to Political Philosophy, we may say that Kant failed because he hovered between two entirely different conceptions of the State. He never decided whether to regard the State as a fortuitous aggregate of individuals, or as that without which even individual life would have no moral content nor significance.

And, if it be asked why so great a thinker vacillated on so important a point, the answer must be that Kant had inherited from his predecessors—from Locke and Hume on the one hand and from Rousseau on the other—a theory of reason, both practical and speculative, which made it almost impossible for him to conceive of the individual save as an isolated unit; or to pass, without flagrant contradiction, from the mere empty form—the ‘transcendental apperception’ in the one case, the blank ideas of Duty and of Right in the other case—to a world constituted by rational objects of knowledge and desire. Hence, although the starting-point of his theory was a conception of Right which treated the individual not as an isolated unit but as bound, and therefore from the beginning qualified, by obligations to others—a conception which logically excluded the recognition of individual caprice—Kant was perpetually impelled to fall back upon the contradictory doctrine which reduces Right to a mere matter of a chance majority; that being the notion of Right which logically corresponds to the conception of the individual as self-contained and as existing apart from all necessary relation to others. The same conception of the individual as essentially void of all content, as endowed solely with the faculty of willing nothing in particular, which had shaped the theory of Rousseau, in a less extreme (and therefore in a less consistent) form haunted also the imagination of Kant.

But the very inconsistency of Kant’s theory is, in fact, its main title to our gratitude. For it was only when it became apparent that to graft the idea of Duty on to that of Right was to make a fatal wound in Rousseau’s assumption of individual isolation, that men were forced to ask themselves whether that assumption was not unwarrantable and untenable from the very beginning. Kant’s service is to have paved the way for the utter rejection of that assumption by unconsciously showing that it was incompatible with the idea of duty. And the work of his successors was, by slow and tentative stages, to build up a theory whose ultimate result is to show that moral relations, more or less imperfectly realised, have formed the essence of the individual from first to last, no less in the ‘state of nature’ than in the fully organised civil community; that such relations, even in their most rudimentary shape, imply the idea of social Right; that this idea, at first the work of instinct and

custom, has gradually come to be informed and remodelled by conscious reason, by the deliberate strivings of states and nations after its more complete realisation; and that the duty of the community to enforce its ideal of Right upon the individual, subject only to limits of expediency, has been recognised at each and every stage of its development, and has been a primary fact in the growth not only of the national but of the individual conscience. Thus, by the labours of Kant's successors, Philosophy has joined hands with primitive lore and with History. The problem of political enquiry has largely changed its shape. Its method, from being abstract, has become concrete and historical. It is seen that the individual can no longer be regarded as prior to the State; but that, in the words of Aristotle, the State is essentially prior to the individual.

The first writer to follow the path opened by Kant was Fichte. Fichte's work in Political Philosophy is comprised in three treatises, the last of which was separated from the first by an interval of twenty years. These are *Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urtheile über die französische Revolution*, published in 1793; *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, dating from 1796, and *Die Staatslehre, oder das Verhältniss des Urstaats zum Vernunftreiche* from 1813, the last year of his vigorous and noble life.

The first of these may, for our present purposes, be almost disregarded. It is little more than a restatement in a more technical, a less striking and an intolerably discursive, form of Rousseau's *Contrat Social*. The second is a far more important work. It preceded Kant's *Rechtslehre* by a year, but was itself preceded at about the same interval by the short sketch *Zum ewigen Frieden*,<sup>1</sup> in which much of the *Rechtslehre* is anticipated. The conclusions of Fichte differ from those of Kant in some important points, or at least in some points which Fichte conceived to be important; but whether the difference represents an advance or no, is a questionable matter. The third treatise is at least as much beyond the second as the second was beyond the first. It definitely throws aside that hesitation about the significance of 'freedom,' which we have noticed in Kant, and finally adopts the moral qualification which Kant had failed consistently to fix upon it. It also contains the first serious and systematic attempt to press History, and with

<sup>1</sup> [The high opinion that Vaughan had of this work is perhaps hardly sufficiently indicated in the present chapter. In the Preface to his translation of Rousseau's essay on *A Lasting Peace* he states that 'of all the pleas for a Federation of Europe, Rousseau's alone excepted, the *Lasting Peace* of Kant is the most striking and the most cogent.' See also *Political Writings of Rousseau*, vol. i. p. 363, and vol. ii. pp. 19-20 and 526. —ED.]

History the spirit of Nationality, into the service of Political Philosophy. It thus has a twofold interest. It marks the first definite step forward in Political theory which had been taken since Kant; and it marks a new era of European history, for it was the offspring of the great national uprising against which—alike in Spain, in Germany and in Russia—the power of Napoleon was broken and which, continued long after Napoleon's fall, has changed the face of Europe. It has a further but purely personal interest, as representing the last course of Lectures delivered by Fichte. Inspired throughout with a burning love for his country, it must have kindled a like fire in those who originally heard it. He closed the course, it is said, with the words: 'I will resume these lectures next year, in a free country.' Within a few weeks he was struck down by small-pox. He had lived only to see the opening reverses, he did not witness the closing triumphs, of the great campaign of liberation.

To pass from Kant to Fichte is a strange contrast. In all these works there is that curious blending of flightiness and philosophic genius which is characteristic of Fichte. In all the main thread of the argument is apt to lose itself in unnecessary details and in hair-splitting refinements which too often deserve no better name than arrant sophistry. The first, as has been said, is in the main a repetition of the *Contrat Social*. It is built throughout on the theory of Contract, on the conception of a national Right preceding all society, which it professes to apply with more thoroughgoing consistency than had been done by Rousseau.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, two points in which it may be said to carry the argument into a higher region than is common in Rousseau's work. It is more explicit in acknowledging that the 'state of nature' is a state governed by moral relations;<sup>2</sup> and it lays greater stress on the function of the State in the moral and intellectual training of its citizens, in the repression of their lower and the development of their higher faculties.<sup>3</sup> The State is no longer, as it is apt to appear in Rousseau, a mere piece of machinery. It is an association for certain moral and spiritual ends; and it is an association which

<sup>1</sup> *Beiträge*; Fichte's *Werke*, vi. p. 71; 'Rousseau . . . verfuhr viel zu schonend mit euch, ihr Empiriker; das war sein Fehler.'

<sup>2</sup> 'Man glaubte ehemals im Naturrechte, auf einen ursprünglichen Naturzustand zurückgehen zu müssen. . . . Und doch ist dieser Weg der einzig richtige: um den Grund der Verbindlichkeit aller Verträge zu entdecken, muss man sich den Menschen noch von keinen äusseren Verträgen gebunden, bloss unter dem Gesetze seiner Natur, d. i. unter dem Sittengesetze stehend, denken; und das ist der Naturzustand' (*ib.* p. 82; compare p. 130).

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* pp. 86-101.

implies a constant progress from the less to the more complete realisation of those ends.<sup>1</sup> All these conceptions—difficult as they are to harmonise with the fundamental idea of Contract—are doubtless to be found in Rousseau. But they are not so definitely realised, nor so clearly worked out, by him as by Fichte.

<sup>1</sup> *Beiträge*, pp. 101-105. 'Keine Staatsverfassung ist unabänderlich; es ist in ihrer Natur, dass sie sich alle ändern' (p. 103).

## CHAPTER III

### FICHTE

THE close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth were no less stirring in the history of thought than in that of action. The Revolutionists and Napoleon and the heroes of the Liberation recast the outward map of Europe; the German philosophers did no less for the world of thought. And in no sphere of thought was the change more searching than in the region of political belief. The practical ideals of men were thrown into a new mould as they passed through the fiery furnace of the Revolution; their theory of the State was of necessity remodelled to correspond. In political theory, as in other branches of speculation, the beginning of this process is represented by Kant, and its completion by Hegel. And here, still more clearly perhaps than elsewhere, the passage from the one to the other is recorded in the various stages of the work of Fichte.

Starting from a position hardly to be distinguished from that of Rousseau, Fichte ends with a creed which only needs more of systematic reflection and less fervour of moral appeal to form at least the foundation of the edifice of Hegel. The individualism of his earlier writings is gradually replaced by a theory which errs, if it errs at all, by allowing too much, rather than too little, to the supremacy of the State. The cosmopolitan of 1793 closed his days with a trumpet call to the slowly wakening genius of German nationality. The professor of abstract, and therefore stationary, rights spoke his last and his best as the inspired champion of progress.

The steps of this significant transformation are clearly marked. The first is found in the *Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urtheile über die französische Revolution*, of 1793; the second in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, published in 1796; the third and last in the *Staatslehre*, delivered as lectures in 1813, the last year of Fichte's life, and published in 1820. There are two other important, but less systematic, writings; the earlier of which, *Der geschlossene Handelstaat* (1800), stands in close relation to

the *Grundlage* of 1796; while the later, the famous *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1807-8), is drawn from the same vein of thought as the *Staatslehre* of 1813. It marks the beginning, as the *Staatslehre* marks the close, of the movement which resulted in the triumphant struggle against the tyranny of Napoleon.

From first to last Fichte, in this as in other fields of philosophy, is a pioneer. It is this that makes his importance in the history of political thought. He moves in the van of a great host, the picked men of his nation. And, like them, he is slowly feeling his way from one ideal to another; from the rule of the individual to that of the community; from anarchy to a reasoned conception of government and of national responsibility. Hence each of his political treatises corresponds, more or less closely, to one of the turning-points in the great European struggle of his day: the *Beiträge* to the Jacobin domination and the Reign of Terror; the *Grundlage* to the first decisive triumph of Napoleon, 'the child and champion of Jacobinism,' in Italy; the *Geschlossene Handelstaat*, a strange forecast of the continental Blockade, to the First Consulate, the Constitution of the year VIII. and the battle of Marengo; the *Reden* to the treaty of Tilsit and the uprising of the Spanish nation against the insolent usurpations of Napoleon; the *Staatslehre* to the humiliation of the universal tyrant at Moscow, and the birth of the German nation amid the throes of the war of Liberation.

Thus, by its very groping and incompleteness, the work of Fichte is a faithful record, the most full and accurate that has come down to us, of the mental struggles of his generation. Other thinkers of the time, notably Schelling and Hegel, must have gone through much the same process of development. They too, as legend relates, began by planting a tree of liberty in the public square—a feat which Fichte may be said to have emulated in the *Beiträge*. But Hegel, at any rate, worked and grew in silence; while Fichte not only planted his tree, but pruned it, uprooted it and set another in its stead, with all Europe looking on. Each stage of the process, moreover, was loudly proclaimed to be the last. Each theory in turn—it might be an echo of Rousseau, it might be an anticipation of Hegel—was uttered with all the fervid conviction—and, it must be added, with all the bans and curses—of the one true political gospel. The prophetic strain had the mastery of all others in the nature of Fichte. He had neither the philosophic detachment of Hegel nor his patient depth of speculation. But for that very reason he appealed to the hearts of men with a power which was unknown to the younger thinker; and in the supreme crisis of his nation's history he played a part which was certainly more glorious than that subsequently played

by Hegel, the theorist and idolater of Prussian bureaucracy, and which neither Germany nor Europe can ever willingly suffer to be forgotten.

The earliest of Fichte's works, the *Beiträge*, is so manifestly modelled on the *Social Contract* that a detailed examination of it is hardly needed for our present purpose. It is, in fact, the political theory of Rousseau—as that theory was interpreted by the Revolutionists—tacked on to the moral theory of Kant. Its main interest lies in the clear proof it offers—a proof, indeed, little needed by those who have studied both authors with attention—how close was the affinity between Kant and Rousseau; and how, in the region of morals and to some extent also of politics, the former did little more than bring out into clear consciousness the ideas implicitly contained, though doubtless but half realised and imperfectly worked out, in the writings of the latter.

This double affinity appears, no doubt, less in the main body of the treatise than in the setting which surrounds it. The political principle of the *Beiträge*, as will be seen, is individualism pure and simple. It is a refinement on the theory of the *Social Contract* as understood, or rather glossed, by the critics and interpreters of Rousseau; and a mere travesty of that theory as it took shape in the mind of Rousseau himself and, still more, as it was subsequently remodelled by Kant. But with the moral theory, in which this exaggeration of revolutionary politics is embedded, the case is different. The very completeness with which Fichte separates the sphere of politics from that of morals enables him, while departing from the *Social Contract* in the former region, to support, and indeed most significantly to enforce, the conception that underlies it in the latter.

The master passion of Rousseau was moral rather than political; and the idea that inspires all his writings is a burning faith that the will of man is a law unto itself. It is, indeed, sometimes supposed that to Rousseau the will of man means merely the caprice of the individual. That, however, is certainly not the case. Throughout his writings it is not on the individual, but on the universal, element of the will and reason—not on what severs men, but on what unites them—that he lays stress. It is not to the will of the isolated atoms, the *volonté de tous*, but to the 'permanent reason' of man as disciplined by Society, the *volonté générale*, the *moi transporté dans l'unité commune*,<sup>1</sup> that he appeals. It is clear that this conception only needs a more speculative treatment, such a handling as would bring it into connection with metaphysics as well as with ethics and politics, to become the autonomy of the will, the source of the categorical

<sup>1</sup> *Émile*, p. 9. [*Œuvres complètes de J.-J. R.* (Paris, 1836), ii. 401-2.]



imperative, as conceived by Kant. The substantial agreement of the two writers is, indeed, obscured by certain differences on points which, though by no means trivial, are certainly of less importance. Thus, however little it may square with the commonly received opinion about him, Rousseau gives far greater weight to the formative influence of society upon the individual than was ever done, or could ever have been done, by Kant. The 'law' of which Kant speaks is a law graven on the heart of the individual. That of Rousseau, however keen his sense of individuality, is rather one writ large in the collective conscience of the community. What both writers, however, value in the individual is not that which calls him apart from other men, but that which he holds in common with them; not that which prompts him to follow the blind instincts of caprice, but that which bids him guide his own conduct by principles that can be taken as a law binding upon all. Neither of them is an individualist, in the only sense in which that term can legitimately be used; and Rousseau, when allowance has been made for certain obvious inconsistencies, is so even less than Kant.

Now, individualist as is the political theory of the *Beiträge*, at any rate in its main scope and purport, its moral ideas are avowedly drawn from Kant. Fichte is as positive as Kant in placing the moral life of man under the control of universal laws, and in tracing those laws to the sole authority of the human will. He is as explicit in rejecting all those considerations, whether of lasting happiness or the pleasure of the moment, which had supplied the staple of eighteenth-century Ethics and which, at any rate in the less extreme form of 'happiness,' go some way to vitiate the moral conceptions even of Rousseau. More than this; to Fichte, as to Kant, the true self of man—that which, far more than his speculative capacity or his power of interpreting nature, marks his 'sovereignty of reason,' is to be found in the will; in its originaive faculty; in its capacity for determining itself by its own laws, without regard to the promptings of sense or of anything beyond the ends which it draws from its own nature and imposes on its own activity.

One passage will suffice to illustrate this side of Fichte's early speculation: 'We feel the need of judging the facts of human conduct by a law which is not itself drawn from any fact and cannot be contained in any fact. Whence can we expect to draw such a law, and where can we hope to find it? Beyond doubt, in our own Self; in our Self, so far as it is not moulded by outward things through the medium of experience, since what is so moulded is not our true Self but an accretion from without; in the pure, original form of the Self, as it would be when stripped of all experience. The difficulty, no doubt, is to strip off all such alien elements from

our mental history and to arrive at the original form of the Self. If, however, we can discover any element of our nature which, having nothing in common with experience, cannot by any possibility have sprung from experience, we should certainly be entitled to conclude that this is the original form of our Self. And such an element we *do* find in the law of duty. If this law is to be found in our heart—and that it is to be found there is a plain matter of fact—it cannot be a foreign accretion; for it is the very antithesis of anything that we can acquire by experience. This, therefore, must be the pure form of our Self.’<sup>1</sup> The conception is identical with that of the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*; it reappears more than once in the later parts of the *Beiträge*; and in one form or another, Fichte, as will be seen, remained faithful to it until the end.

To pass from the moral to the political aspect of the *Beiträge* is a curious contrast. The relation between them is, in fact, purely one of opposition. Morals, in Fichte’s view, is the sphere of duty and inflexible law; politics, on the other hand, is the sphere of caprice. ‘There the moral law is silent, and we stand free to act purely as we please.’<sup>2</sup> This clean severance between morals and politics was, no doubt, the natural outcome of the individualist theory which Fichte took over from the dominant school of his own day. But no previous writer had realised the necessity of the severance so clearly as Fichte, and none had accepted its consequences so unreservedly.

Nowhere does this appear so markedly as in Fichte’s treatment of the chief issue with which the *Beiträge* is concerned. One of the main questions raised by the Revolution in the minds of those who witnessed it was this: Has a nation the right to change its constitution as, and when, it thinks fit, or is it bound by the conventions and traditions of the past? Few men nowadays would be prepared to deny such a right, or indeed to feel anything but wonder that it should ever have been challenged. But contemporary writings, notably Burke’s *Reflections*, afford ample evidence that it was so; and Fichte was justified in thinking that no defence of the Revolution which failed to meet the issue was likely to win, or deserved to win, a hearing. It is, in fact, with this issue that the first, and most important, part of the *Beiträge* is entirely taken up.

Other advocates of individual rights—though not, it must be remembered, Rousseau—had surrounded the Social Contract with a kind of religious terror. They had sought to draw from it indirectly and by a side-wind that compulsive force which instinct

<sup>1</sup> *Beiträge, Einleitung*, § 1; Fichte’s *Werke*, vi. 59.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Das Sittengesetz schweigt, und wir stehen bloss unter unserer Willkür’ (*ib.* p. 60).

taught them to be necessary to the State but which their principles forbade them to recognise directly and on its own merits. Fichte begins by boldly acknowledging the fallacy of this expedient. He at once recognises that, given the principle of individual rights, no tradition however sacred and no contract however equitable can be permanently binding. What gives authority to the social contract, as to every other form of contract, is that it represents the spontaneous act, the unforced will, of the individual. It follows that, directly such a contract ceases to embody his will, directly its fulfilment ceases to be his spontaneous desire, its virtue is lost and he is at liberty to withdraw from its obligations. 'The question whether a contract once made can be altered and the question whether it can be made in the first instance are identical.'<sup>1</sup>

Each man who withdraws from the State is, no doubt, bound to make compensation for any loss that other parties may be proved to suffer by his change of purpose. But the fact is that no such loss is possible; and the belief that it is, is merely due to a confusion between the conditions of the social contract and those of the business contracts so familiar to us as between man and man. Till the moment of withdrawal, the supposed person has, *ex hypothesi*, discharged his duties to and in the State; and apart from those duties, now legitimately renounced, neither the State nor any individual in it has the smallest claim upon him. His obligations to the State, so long as they lasted, were absolutely definite and tangible—the payment of taxes, the observance of civil laws and regulations; and to say that to the State he owes, either directly or indirectly, the general development of his faculties or any other benefit so incalculable, and to make that the ground of a claim for eternal gratitude on his part toward the State, is either bitter irony or a deliberate imposture. 'To this moment you have discharged your debts to me, and I mine to you. From this moment you cease to discharge them; I do the same. The account balances; we are quits.'<sup>2</sup>

So far concerning the right of one man to dissolve the contract which bound him to the State. But what is the right of one is the right equally of more. In any numbers, large or small, men are at liberty to renounce the engagements which they have hitherto recognised as binding; and so long as they make no attempt to force compliance upon others, are free to found a fresh community upon whatever terms they please. There is no need for them to leave their old home; that, with all their property, is their own to do with as they will, and the State has no part nor lot in the control

<sup>1</sup> 'Die Frage, ob sie ihren Vertrag ändern können, jener—ob sie überhaupt einen Vertrag schliessen können—völlig gleich ist' (Fichte's *Werke*, vi. p. 86).

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* pp. 116, 136-48.

either of it or of the movements of its owners. It may be said that the original community is injured by the formation of a new one in the midst of it. But that objection comes with a bad grace from those who not only endure but court the existence of such 'states within the State'—the Jewish community, for instance, or the Church, or the military caste—in the heart of their society. And even were the injury ten times greater than in fact it is, no State has the right forcibly to prevent it. To drive men to the choice between unwilling membership of a given community and an equally unwilling banishment from house and home is to put constraint upon the most precious of all their liberties, to violate a right which belongs to them purely as they are men, a right which the State never gave and which it is utterly beyond its competence to take away.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the State is to Fichte, throughout its existence, what to other writers of his school it was only at the hour of its formation; a purely voluntary association, a partnership that may be renounced at any moment by any number of the individuals who in the first instance combined to form it. It is a rope of sand liable, by his own admission, to crumble into nothing at the first touch. Its very territory, or what passes for such, is a happy camping-ground on which various companies, to any number, are invited to set up their rival booths. Well might Fichte say, 'In the sphere of politics the moral law is silent'; for all sense of obligation between man and man is explicitly shut out from it, and the very promise, to which the State owes its being, proclaims itself from the first as revocable at pleasure. Well might he add, 'There we stand free to act purely as we please'; for no other writer had carried out with consistency so unflinching the sacred right of the individual to change his mind.

It is true that Fichte betrays some embarrassment in asserting the eternal privilege of those who make contracts to break them. He is aware that he will be charged with standing forward as the advocate of bad faith. He does not shrink from admitting that he will be called the apologist of liars.<sup>2</sup> He bases his plea upon the absolute separation of politics from morals, and on the absurdity of turning questions of natural right into a crusade on behalf of honesty

<sup>1</sup> *Werke*, vi. pp. 148-54.

<sup>2</sup> 'Du sagst mir: "Wenn auch Er log, so will doch Ich kein Lügner seyn." . . . Verbindet meine Moralität den anderen zu der gleichen Moralität? Ich bin nicht Executor des Sittengesetzes überhaupt; das ist Gott. Dieser hat die Lügenhaftigkeit zu strafen; ich bin nur Executor meiner durch das Sittengesetz mir verstatteten Rechte, und unter diese Rechte gehört die Aufsicht über die Herzensreinigkeit anderer nicht' (*ib.* pp. 112, 113).

and the moral law.<sup>1</sup> That, however, is just the significant point in his position. He says clearly what other writers of his school had shrunk from explaining even to themselves. He gives explicit utterance to a principle which, from the first, had been implied by the whole theory of contract and individual rights. Once put the individual to stand purely by himself, and Fichte was right in thinking that the moral law, which is nothing more nor less than the articulate expression of the primal bond between man and man, can have no meaning for him. Previous writers had contented themselves with confining the usurpations of morals on politics within as narrow limits as possible. Fichte, with more consistency, is resolved to put a stop to them altogether.

And this brings us to the other point which gives interest to the *Beiträge*. It was because he banished moral claims from the field of politics that Fichte was also led to repudiate compulsion. He saw what previous champions of contract had never discovered, that the two things stand or fall together; that to base the coercive power of the State on the supposed consent of the individual is a contradiction; and that it is only in the name of a law which exists altogether independently of the individual that the individual can legitimately be controlled. This discovery gave an entirely new turn to the theory of contract.

From the first that theory had held within itself two discordant elements. It sought to combine the principle of individual independence with the principle of coercive authority. It is plain that, as a matter of abstract right, the two principles cannot logically exist together. And, from the first, it was the former element that carried everything before it in the sphere of practice. But it was reserved for Fichte to assert its supremacy in the region of theory. The *Beiträge*, in fact, is the speculative counterpart of what Paine with some justice has called the 'spontaneous anarchy' of the first era of the Revolution. And it has, what in the realm of theory is a less questionable virtue than in that of practice, the merit of unwavering consistency. At the same time it must be admitted that, in striking out the element of compulsion from the theory of contract, Fichte was robbing that theory of all that had made it plausible. It may safely be said that the vast popularity of the theory was due to the aptness with which it seemed to harmonise the two elements essential to the healthy life of the State, the element of individual freedom and the element of corporate control. The term *Contract* was in fact a brilliant metaphor whose force lay in the skill with which it wedded these distinct and, in truth, contradictory ideals. From

<sup>1</sup> 'Du musst nicht aus den Grenzen des Naturrechtes in die der Moral übergehen' (*Werke*, vi. p. 112).

the moment of its coinage the metaphor was mistaken for an argument; and, as an argument, its cogency depended on the maintenance of the balance between the two ideals which it embodied. Directly one or other of them is dropped, the metaphor loses its virtue; and the argument, covertly founded on it, is overthrown. And this is precisely what was done by Fichte. In dropping the principle of compulsion, he broke the spell which the theory of contract had cast over the minds of men for so many generations. He made it plain that the supposed fusion between the two elements of the theory had from the first been a delusion. In banishing compulsion from politics, as previously in divorcing politics explicitly from morals, he reduced the theory of contract to absurdity.

In the *Beiträge* we have what is perhaps the most trenchant statement of individualist politics that has ever seriously been put forward. But, consistent as he is, even Fichte is unable to avoid occasional lapses into the instinctive prejudices of mankind; and this is the more natural, because his main argument, which in effect narrows the sphere of politics to the material needs of man, is in glaring contradiction with the idealist principles which it was his life's work to establish.

Thus we find him eager to insist that 'the only possible end' of the State is to train men in the service of freedom; that ceaseless progress in that service is the inalienable right of man;<sup>1</sup> and, what is most significant of all, that such progress is imposed on man as a duty by the moral law.<sup>2</sup> Even if 'freedom' is to be here taken, as Fichte seems to assert, in the purely negative sense of the 'right to acknowledge no law save that which I impose upon myself,'<sup>3</sup> we have yet an explicit abandonment of the position that 'the moral law is silent in politics.' And whether Fichte is in fact able to limit the term in this manner, must be regarded as more than doubtful. For, if this were in truth all, by what right would he talk of progress? How could he speak of men being gradually prepared by the discipline of government to do

<sup>1</sup> 'Eine Widerlegung (dieser Grundsätze) . . . müsste zeigen, dass Cultur zur Freiheit nicht der einzig-mögliche Endzweck der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft sei; dass es kein unveräußerliches Menschenrecht sei in dieser Cultur bis ins unendliche fortzuschreiten' (Fichte's *Werke*, vi. p. 106; compare p. 101).

<sup>2</sup> 'Möchte noch so scharf erwiesen sein, dass jede Staatsverfassung vermöge des durch das Sittengesetz geforderten Fortgangs der Cultur von Zeit zu Zeit abgeändert und verbessert werden müsse . . .,' etc. (*ib.* p. 111; compare p. 101).

<sup>3</sup> 'Die politische Freiheit (ist) das Recht, kein Gesetz anzuerkennen, als welches man sich selbst gab' (*ib.* p. 101).

without any government at all? <sup>1</sup> If such a conception does not attribute moral functions to the governing power, were they only those of a schoolmaster to bring men to the liberty of perfect manhood, what meaning can it possibly bear? The task of government, conceived in this sense, is not merely the negative task of releasing the individual from leading-strings which ought never to have been imposed; that is a thing that can be done at a moment's notice. It is also the positive task of training him to stand without them; it is the task of teaching him to act on his own prompting as justly as he would have acted at the compulsive bidding of the law.

The truth is that Fichte here admits two ideas, neither of which is to be reconciled with the negative conception of politics from which he started: the idea of progress and that of the moral, or educative, function of the State. The two are closely connected; neither logically nor—at any rate in modern times—as a matter of history are they to be divorced. And each of them is at plain variance with the individualist theory of politics, the theory of abstract rights, which it was the main object of the *Beiträge* to uphold. The idea of progress is incompatible with the theory of abstract rights; for an abstract right, from its very nature, is incapable of development or growth. The assignment of an educative function to government is incompatible with the individualist theory of politics; for it means an interference with the acts and inclinations of the governed which at once subordinate the individual to the State. It is true that in each case Fichte reduces the contradiction within the narrowest possible limits. But the principle once admitted, was bound, as time went on, to assert itself more completely. And the later history of Fichte is the record of a man who is gradually working his way from a narrow conception of political life to a wider one; from the individualism of the French Revolution to the more generous ideals which were at once the cause and the effect of the struggle for national existence against Napoleon.

The first stage in this advance is marked by the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796). The contradictions of this treatise are at least as curious as those of the *Beiträge*. Contract still remains as the nominal basis of the State. The cleavage between politics and morals is asserted still more sharply than in the earlier work. But each of these doctrines appears in a form which entirely alters its significance. If Fichte had deliberately set himself to show

<sup>1</sup> 'Wären wirklich taugliche Mittel gewählt, so würde die Menschheit sich ihrem grossen Ziele allmählig annähern. . . . Könnte der Endzweck je völlig erreicht werden, so würde gar keine Staatsverfassung mehr nöthig sein' (*Werke*, vi. p. 102).

that the same form of words is capable of covering entirely different meanings, he could hardly have succeeded better.

Thus, in basing Society on contract, previous writers—and Fichte himself in the *Beiträge*—had always laid the foundation of contract itself upon the indefeasible rights of the individual. It was this, in fact, that alone had given life to the endless variations upon the otherwise insipid theme of contract. In the *Grundlage*, on the other hand, the idea of individual rights is explicitly withdrawn. In the sphere of practice its place is taken by a tentative, but still unmistakable, form of socialism. And in the speculative 'deduction' which paves the way for this transformation, Fichte puts forth all his powers to prove that neither in knowledge nor in action can the individual take the smallest step—he cannot even attain consciousness of his own individuality—until he has recognised the free action of other individuals, of like nature with himself, upon the whole sphere of his possible experience and conduct. 'It is only among men that man becomes man. If man is to exist at all, it must be as one of a number.'<sup>1</sup> What meaning the theory of contract can bear in the face of such a conception as this, it would be difficult to say.

Yet again. The conception of contract, as the expression of a deep-seated belief in the sovereignty of the individual, logically goes hand in hand with a sharp separation between the spheres of politics and of morals. The same keen sense of individuality which gave life to the theory of contract, necessarily prompted men to reserve as large a space as possible for what they regarded as the free action of the individual, his action as a moral being, and correspondingly to narrow the field of his action under what seemed to them a law imposed on him from without, his action as member of the community or the State. Whether they did not exaggerate the self-sufficiency of the individual, as a moral agent, is another matter; but on this point no doubt appears to have suggested itself to their minds. They had started with a false antithesis between the individual and the community—an antithesis which would not have been made at all unless under the implied assumption that the individual is everything and the community nothing; and the fallacy of this first assumption naturally pursued them to the end. It was because men overrated what the individual can do for himself in morals that they underrated what is to be done for him by the organised action of the community in politics. If they emptied political life of all serious meaning, it was because they had set out with giving more to the moral life of the individual than it can fairly be made to hold. As in all such cases, the real strength of their theory lay not in its negative

<sup>1</sup> *Grundlage*: Fichte's *Werke*, iii. 35-9.



but in its positive side. It was not on what it denied of the political but on what it claimed for the moral life of man that its influence was based. It was not because it narrowed his political range, but because it widened, or seemed to widen, the scope of his moral freedom, that it came to be universally believed. Unless this is borne in mind, it is impossible that we should either understand the motives of those who held the theory or grasp the true bearings of the theory itself.

The individual, in short, is on this theory a full-grown man before he enters the community; he enters it with all the faculties and all the rights of the man; and that being so, it is but justice to himself that he should jealously guard against suffering himself to be treated as a child. The social contract may be forced upon him as a measure of practical convenience; but his choice is free and, if inevitable, is so merely because his convenience is plain. It is indeed a compromise between conflicting interests. But, like all compromises, it has a double aspect. It brings with it a certain sacrifice of his liberties; but it is also the charter of his rights. All that a man does not explicitly surrender is solemnly set apart and confirmed as his inalienable right for ever. Between the small sphere that he surrenders—no more than is necessary to secure his life and property—and the well-nigh unlimited sphere of activity—religious, moral and intellectual—that he retains there can henceforth be no confusion. A deep gulf has been fixed between them; and that gulf no power on earth has the right to pass.

Such, then, was the separation which the theory of contract naturally established between the field of politics and the field of morals. And nowhere, as we have seen, had it been drawn more sharply than in the *Beiträge*, with which Fichte opened his work as a philosopher. In the *Grundlage*, as has been said, it is enforced, so far as words go, with still greater precision. But when we come to sift—and, still more, to compare—Fichte's utterances in detail, we find that it vanishes to almost nothing.

So much stress was laid on this distinction both by Fichte himself at the time when the *Grundlage* was published and by the editor of his collected works after his death—moreover, the matter itself goes so completely to the heart of political theory—that it is worth while to examine it with some care.

After elaborately deducing the idea of Right from the fundamental nature of the human mind, after proving that no man can 'think himself' without at the same time thinking other reasonable beings of like powers with his own, nor act intelligently without respecting their freedom as he would respect his own, Fichte is mindful to add: 'The law of Right, so deduced, has nothing to do with the law of moral conduct. The moral law is a categorical

command. The law of Right is never a command; it is never more than a permission to enforce a right. Indeed, such an enforcement of right may often be forbidden by the moral law.’<sup>1</sup> And in another passage he makes the same distinction still more explicitly, though from a slightly different point of view. ‘The reasonable being is not absolutely bound, in virtue of its own reasonableness, to will the freedom of all other reasonable beings. This principle makes the dividing line between the sphere of Natural Right and that of Morals; it is the essential mark of an accurate conception of the former science. In the sphere of morals we are confronted with an obligation to will the freedom of others. But in the sphere of Natural Right we are only entitled to tell a man that such and such will be the consequences of his action. If he is prepared to take the consequences, or if he hopes to escape them, it is impossible to argue the question with him any further.’<sup>2</sup>

In these passages we have two different aspects of the same argument. In the former Fichte seems to confine himself to a comparison between particular rights and particular duties. In the latter he compares the moral law and the law of Natural Right, as abstract principles. But in both cases alike he insists that the moral law is absolute, the law of Natural Right, on the other hand, never more than permissive. Thus a particular duty once recognised as mine, must be performed at whatever cost. As soon as it is presented to me, I have no choice save either to do it or suffer myself to be ‘reckoned among the transgressors.’ A right, on the contrary, may be mine in the fullest possible sense; but I am never under an obligation to enforce it, and often distinctly under an obligation to abstain from doing so. Duty has no reference to anything beyond itself. Right, on the other hand, is always subject to be checked by the principle of expediency and not seldom to be cancelled by the principle of duty.

The same contrast appears when we turn from matters of detailed conduct to compare the two principles of right and duty in general. In order to put this in a tangible shape, let us on the one hand suppose a man who up to this time has led an utterly careless life but who now is suddenly touched with promptings of ‘conversion’; and on the other hand let us suppose a savage who up to this time has lived apart from all other men but who now is suddenly led to question whether he shall join a given community, a given state, or no. The former has only to ask himself: Is it, or is it not, my duty to change my way of life? Shall I, or shall I not, conform my private will to the law that is laid down for all mankind? The latter, however much he may admit that the full

<sup>1</sup> Fichte’s *Werke*, iii. p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 88.

powers of manhood are never to be reached except in society, is yet fully entitled to shrink from paying the price which society demands of its members. All that can be fairly required of him is that he shall clearly realise the price which he, in his turn, pays in cutting himself off from society with all its rights and obligations, and that he shall take the consequences of his savagery without complaining. Thus here too, as in the sphere of detail, we find, in Fichte's view, that the moral law is binding upon all men without qualification; but that the law of Right is binding only upon those who freely accept it, and that its acceptance must depend upon the view they happen to take of its consequences; in other words, that it is determined by expediency. The only difference is that in the sphere of detail expediency means the convenience of others as well as, if not in preference to, my own, and that in this sphere expediency itself, even in that wider sense, must at times give way to the absolute veto of the moral law; while in the acceptance or rejection of the law of Right, as a general principle, the expediency which has to be considered is nothing more than the supposed convenience of the individual himself.

Such is the distinction that Fichte has in view when he speaks of the moral law as absolute and the law of Right as never more than permissive. And the question at once arises: how far is such a distinction valid in itself, and how far is it consistent with what Fichte says elsewhere in the *Grundlage* upon these matters? The two questions are so closely connected that it would be idle to attempt to treat them separately.

In the first place, then, can it be said that there is any reality in the distinction which Fichte draws between the imperative obligation of the moral law and the merely contingent obligation of the law of Right, as general principles? The latter, at least as much as the former, is, by his own admission, bound up with the inmost being of man's nature. To recognise the freedom of others and its reaction upon ours is, as Fichte himself insists, a necessary stage in the formation of the most elementary self-consciousness, a law of thought implied in the most fundamental workings of our reason. And that recognition contains, at least in germ, the whole principle of the law of Right. Does it not also contain—we are compelled to ask—at least 'in promise and in potency,' the whole principle of the moral law? Both the 'moral sense' and the sense of Right take this source in the intellectual perception that others have claims which we are bound in duty to respect. Once add to this intellectual perception of the individual the will to act accordingly, the practical determination that he will square his conduct with his knowledge, and we have the frame of mind which bows alike to the moral law and to the law of Right. In their

origins it is impossible to distinguish between the two; and it must be admitted that Fichte makes no serious attempt to do so. But if one of the two is more closely entwined with the very roots of human nature than the other, if one of them therefore is more absolute and less contingent than the other, it is, on Fichte's own showing, not the moral law but the law of Right. For while it is possible to conceive of a man who should set the moral law at defiance, or even be ignorant of its very existence, it is impossible to conceive of one who should be without that recognition of the free action of others upon himself which, in Fichte's argument, constitutes the essence of the law of Right.

On what ground, then, can it be pleaded that the obligation to bow to the moral law is more imperative than to bow to the law of Right? Can anything be urged in favour of the former that cannot be urged with equal force in favour of the latter? Both alike are primary elements in the being of man; both alike are essential to his growth. It may not be true to say, as Fichte does, that the idea of Right is prior in man's experience to that of the moral law. The truth rather is that the two are inseparable; that they are merely different aspects of one and the same principle, which presents itself to man's intellect at the very dawn of his experience and which he can only reject with his will at the cost of sinking to a level with the beasts. That is the true 'deduction' both of the moral law and of the law of Right. That, therefore, is the true sanction of each and the true source of its authority.

But if the origin of the two laws is the same, so also is the method by which each works itself out in practical application. The moral law, like the law of Right, unfolds itself as a working system under the guidance of two distinguishable, yet kindred, principles; on the one hand, at the prompting of instinctive reason; on the other hand, at the bidding of expediency, deliberately accepted as an end and consciously pursued. The former principle, drawing as it does not only upon the intellect or distinctively calculating powers, but upon the whole nature of man, gives rise in particular to those sides of his experience, whether moral or political, which tend to mark off one nation and one age from another. It is this, for instance, that, given the radically different assumptions of the Greek and of the Jew, caused the practical code of the two nations, both in morals and in politics, to work out into such completely different shapes. The latter principle accounts for those sides of human conduct in which all nations and all ages are agreed or, to speak more correctly, in which their differences tend to shrink within the narrowest limits. Yet, distinguishable as they are, the two principles are inseparably intertwined. There is perhaps no case, either in morals or politics, of which we can say that it is wholly due to the working

either of the one principle or of the other; no duty, and no right, which is solely dictated by instinctive reason; none which is the sole creation of expediency, or the deliberate adaptation of means to ends.

Lastly, as the two laws are one in origin and in method, so the spheres of their activity are in great part the same. Each of them deals with human action and motive; and, in the larger number of cases, the workings of the two are hardly to be distinguished. Thus the blank forms in which the guiding principles of human conduct first take conscious shape—the Commandments of the Decalogue, for instance—may be indifferently treated either as inspirations of the individual conscience or as injunctions of the community. They could never have arisen without prompting from men of exceptionally keen moral insight, the prophets and seers of the nation; but they could also never have arisen, if the voice of the prophet had not found an echo in the heart of the community to which he spoke. It is as uttering the mind of the community that they acquire binding force; it is because they are enforced by the will of the community that they come to have a definite sanction. Without that sanction, at any rate in the earlier history of mankind, they would have had small hold upon the heart or conscience of the individual; they must soon have become a dead letter and their very memory have perished from the minds of men. It is only in the community that the moral law, setting aside that comparatively small part of it which consists of the 'self-regarding' duties, comes into operation. It is only in the organised community—that is, in the State, more or less fully developed—that its blank forms acquire any definite content, or that any valid security can be attained for its observance.

And the same thing, though doubtless in a less degree, remains true when we turn to the further developments, the fuller and fuller articulation, of the principles of conduct which are silently going on around us throughout the whole course of our lives; which are perpetually modifying our code of conduct, whether in the sphere of morals or in that of politics; and which constitute the progress that is the breath and life both of the moral law and of the idea of Right. In all of these it is the exceptional individual who first utters the word, or does the deed, which brings about the general advance. But the community has been waiting to hear the word spoken, to see the deed done. It is the wisdom of many, as well as the courage of one, that both prompts the innovation and secures its currency.

Thus neither in respect of origin nor of application nor of matter is it possible to draw the line that Fichte attempts to draw between the moral law and the law of Right. And if it is im-

possible to do so on the general grounds to which our enquiry has so far been limited, it is no less impossible on the particular ground assigned by Fichte himself for the distinction. It is not true to say, as Fichte does, that the moral law is always imperative and the law of Right never more than permissive. We have already seen that this distinction breaks down when we compare the two laws on general principles; we have already seen it to be as much of a duty that a man should submit himself to the law of Right, which binds him to membership of a community, as that he should bow to the moral law, which we reckon to bind him as an individual. We are now to ask whether the distinction has any greater force when applied to detailed cases of conduct in the sphere of Right and in that of individual morality.

The truth is that there is no moral duty which is binding always, everywhere and for all. Who is there that would scruple to tell a lie for the sake of saving a life which he believed to be unjustly assailed? The lie told by *La Sœur Simplice* at one of the crowning moments of *Les Misérables* must surely have won its way to every heart. Who but a coward or a crank would shrink from killing the enemy of his country or his cause in battle? Who but a monk could believe that sexual abstinence is under all circumstances a virtue? And if we answer these questions in the negative, that is only another way of saying that, in moral matters as in political, all questions of detailed conduct are questions of expediency; that they can only be settled by an intelligent balancing of consequences; and that all our general rules, however useful they may be for practical guidance, are yet liable to exceptions. In morals, as in politics, the only infallible principles are those which are so wide as to cover the most opposite courses of action in detail. It is always our duty to act with the welfare of our neighbour before our eyes. But two questions still remain; the familiar question, 'And who is my neighbour?' together with the further question, 'And what is his welfare in this particular instance?' The claims of one man upon me may be greater than those of any other; and the true interest of all men may vary with the circumstances of the particular case. In other words, moral duties in matters of detail—the duties I have to consider at any given moment of my life—are not imperative; they are never more than conditional.

And if it is true that there is a conditional element in all moral action, it is equally true that there is an imperative element in all action that we distinguish as political. Circumstances may vary more in the latter than in the former and may therefore play, or seem to play, a larger part in the determination of our action. It may be much harder to lay down general rules for the guidance of the 'citizen' than of the 'man.' But it is idle to make that an

excuse for forgetting that, in any given set of political circumstances, there is a best course to be discovered and that our duty to find that course and, having found it, to cleave to it is an absolute one—a duty no less imperative than it is to abstain from murder, from slander, or from theft. It is only a culpable want of public spirit and of public honour that blinds us, as it does blind us habitually, to this fact.

It is, in truth, our purely negative conception of moral duty that makes us acquiesce in an equally negative standard of duty political. Having hardened ourselves to believe that the best man morally is the man who is most free from positive and tangible faults, who most faithfully observes the prohibitions of the Decalogue, we naturally go on to persuade ourselves that the best citizen is he who schools himself to run the smallest possible risk of making blunders. If he always casts his vote on the side of keeping things as they are, we consider him blameless. If he takes the still shorter and surer way, that of absolute abstention, we are not disposed to find any serious fault. The belief that there is such a thing as duty in politics, or that a man lies under any grave responsibility for his political action, can hardly be said to find a place in the conscience of any but an extremely small minority in modern times. To abstain from offence, to avoid affronting public opinion, is our ideal both in morals and in politics.

Nothing indeed can be clearer than that, by temperament as well as on principle, the negative view of action was utterly alien to the ardent soul of Fichte. And, so far as morals are concerned, within the limits of this very treatise he appeals to ideas which are logically inconsistent with it. The one thing of importance in the world of morals, he urges again and again, is not the external act but the temper, the state of will, from which it flows. 'Nothing in the world or out of it can be called good without qualification but the good will' was the famous utterance of Kant; and it is zealously enforced by Fichte. This conviction struck dead against the formalism of conventional morality; and it would naturally have led, as it did lead in the personal conduct both of Kant and Fichte, to the further conception of the moral life as an unceasing effort to find expression for the good will in the energy of outward act. For what goes against formalism goes also against inertness, and a living goodness is nothing if it is not also a positive and active goodness.

Yet it must at the same time be admitted that, with Fichte as with Kant, the exaltation of the good will has a negative as well as a positive side, and that the negative side is too often the one brought to the front. It is rather the will in and for itself than the will as uttering itself in action on which he commonly lays

stress. Or, if he escapes from this danger—from the quietism which in the eighteenth century had won so deep a hold upon the heart of Germany—it is only to fall into a new formalism, that of the 'Categorical Imperative.' The latter error, as has been often shown, was due to the impossibility of drawing a detailed code of moral action from the abstract principle of duty. In that impossibility Fichte, like Kant, was apt to fall back upon the conventional code of his own day, concealing the process from himself by the simple method of assigning it, or convincing himself that he had assigned it, a new sanction. He thus ended very much where he had begun; he recalled the familiar formalism under the thin disguise of an unfamiliar name.

One result of this double, if hardly consistent, view of morals was to furnish Fichte with a double weapon for the disparagement of Right. In the name of the Categorical Imperative he is ready to belittle Right as merely permissive; in the name of the good will he banishes Right to the sphere of outward act and proclaims its sanction to be purely physical. On the former point enough has now been said; but the latter question, which is closely connected with it, demands some further examination.

If it were true to say that the sphere of Right is confined to the outward acts of men, in the rigorous sense of the term 'outward,' it would doubtless follow that its sanction, the penalty by which it is ultimately enforced, must be purely physical. But the question at once arises: 'Is any act of man, other than those done in ignorance or inadvertence, strictly to be called "outward"?' In other words, is not the test of outwardness in action this, that the deed is done in unconsciousness of its true bearing, and that the penalty is inflicted by the uncontrollable process of the laws of nature? A man, by carelessness or mischance, may fall into the fire; and the penalty he pays is that in the mere course of nature he loses a limb or perhaps even his life. The act in this case is a purely outward act, one in which the will has no part; and the appropriate penalty for such an act is a purely physical or outward penalty. Give the same deed a conscious motive, good or doubtful; suppose that a man plunges into the fire either as a martyr, or for a point of honour, or to save the life of another; in other words, give the act an inward significance, and the penalty either vanishes or becomes an inward or moral penalty, such as visits the man who lives for an unworthy or superstitious object.

Now between outward acts, as above defined, and offences against the State, offences committed in the sphere of Right, there is nothing in common. In the latter case disgrace is attached to transgression, a disgrace which is entirely wanting where the law



broken is a natural law and the penalty purely physical. Such disgrace, in so far as it is inflicted and felt, represents a sanction quite other than physical. It stands for what Bentham called the moral or popular sanction, the sanction of public opinion, from which there seems to be no good reason for distinguishing what the same writer set apart as the 'political or legal' sanction. For the political sanction, that which is embodied in 'the sentence of a judge,' is merely a particular form of the popular or moral sanction. It is, in fact, the moral sanction with abstraction made of the public reprobation on which the moral sanction ultimately depends, and which, except in the case of habitual criminals, probably makes the sting even of any sentence inflicted by the judge. And it is sufficiently clear that, if such abstraction were made in reality as well as for purposes of argument, not only would the whole essence of the political sanction be withdrawn, but its very existence be imperilled. In the ordinary course of things, no judge could long continue to pass sentence, unless the force of public opinion lay behind him. One more illustration of the fact, so persistently ignored by Fichte, that the ideas of morals and of politics, of Right and duty, are inseparably intertwined.

It is, of course, true that the outward and visible sanction in the sphere of Right is always some form of physical force. But to argue from this to the conclusion that, behind what is outward and visible, there is no sanction of a more inward and vital character is to show a strange ignorance of human nature and of that special field of it with which this enquiry is concerned. Least of all does it afford ground for that distinction between politics and morals which Fichte is so eager to maintain. By the same rule it would be necessary to say that, because a child is punished or possibly beaten for lying, therefore, and in so far as this is done, the only sanction for the moral duty of truthfulness in the case of children is the coal-hole or the rod. It may be argued perhaps that, where moral duties are concerned, we mark the difference by dropping physical penalties when the child has reached a certain age. Even this defence would not serve to cover the position of Fichte. It would not do away with the fact that, so long as childhood lasts, the moral sanction, if only in the form of a desire for the good opinion of its parents, works in the child's mind side by side with the physical.

But the argument admits of a further answer which puts the whole question in a truer light. Just as the growth of the child is marked by a gradual discontinuance of the physical sanction, so also—though the process doubtless is far slower—is it with the growth of the State. The healthier the State the more completely can it dispense with any sanction save that of public opinion.

This, in fact, is precisely what we mean when we speak of any State as healthy: that an increasingly large proportion of its members is influenced not by fear but by an active sense of duty. To Fichte, however, what is the sign of the health of the State is the sign also of its dissolution. In the *Beiträge* he had said, 'If the end of the State could ever be fully realised, no organised constitution of the State would henceforth be necessary.' And it is clear that, in writing the *Grundlage*, he had by no means changed his mind. Like De Maistre, he had accepted the hangman as the symbol of the State; and, with the healthy instinct of a man who never stooped to sophistry, he was naturally eager, as De Maistre was not, that both symbol and thing symbolised should speedily be done away. It is one more instance of the long struggle between the mechanical and the organic conception of the State, of which his life's work is a record.

The strange thing is that, regarding the State with so deep-rooted a suspicion, Fichte should have been willing to entrust it with such powers over the individual as were of necessity implied in the socialism which it was one object of the *Grundlage* to recommend. To begin by making the State despotic is a curious course for him who desires to end with its extinction. To begin by depriving the individual of that freedom in the control of property which to most men is the sum and substance of the individual's 'rights', is an unpromising method for the man whose ultimate aim is to sweep away the whole organisation of the State and enthrone the individual, subject only to the unquestioned sway of the moral laws, upon its ruins. It is the same inconsistency as that which the revolutionists had already translated into action. And the despotism of the Jacobins was hardly more at variance with the Declaration of the Rights of Man than are the socialist conclusions of the *Grundlage* with its individualist preconceptions.

Yet, side by side with the marked socialism of the *Grundlage* and its still more glaring individualism, we find traces of a conception more fruitful than either of these; more fruitful because, silently dropping all that is mechanical and quickening all that is vital in each of them, it fuses them both in a larger and richer whole. This is the conception of the State as an organism; a conception which, under that particular image and, we may fairly add, in that definite form, appears probably for the first time in this treatise of Fichte. The passage is so remarkable that it will be well to transcribe it at length. Fichte is contrasting the deliberate and conscious act which, in his view, is necessary to the rightful formation of the State with the unconscious and instinctive process which maintains it, and gives it a living unity, after its formation. At the same time he is concerned to show

how the one both prepares the way for and gradually passes into the other.

‘In order to realise this conception more clearly, let us place ourselves once more at the moment when the individual who enters into the contract with the general body is seen in action. He is one of the two contracting parties. As a condition of his admission to the State, he is required to make his contribution to the protective force of the State. By whom is this contribution demanded of him? With whom exactly is it that he negotiates and who is the second party to the contract?

‘This second party demands protection; who is the particular individual on whose behalf the demand is made? Clearly it is made on behalf of no particular individual, and yet on behalf of all; on behalf of every one whose security is attacked; and this may mean every single individual concerned—or it may not. Accordingly the idea of that which stands in need of protection is left in suspense; it is an indeterminate idea; and it is just this which gives rise to the idea of a whole which is not merely imagined, not merely the creation of our thought, like that spoken of above (*Grundlage*, pp. 195-7), but has actual existence; a whole which takes its unity from its own matter; not merely a sum of units, but a totality.

‘Let us explain this more precisely. A purely abstract idea is put together solely by the free act of the mind. So it is with the idea of a political total, expounded above. The idea with which we are here concerned, on the other hand, is put together not by an arbitrary act but in virtue of something corresponding to it in actual life. What that is, remains unknown; but it will be made known in the future, when the attack which all fear is actually made. Who will be the first to suffer, no one knows; it may be any one. Every single individual is therefore entitled to believe that the whole State is organised for his advantage; and for this reason he will gladly make the small contribution demanded of him. On the other hand, the blow may fall on some one else; in this case, the first has already seen his contribution absorbed in the whole, and is unable to withdraw it. This indeterminateness, this uncertainty what particular individual will be the first to suffer—in other words, this suspense of the imagination—is the bond of union between the members of the State. This it is, in virtue of which all are fused into one; and that, no longer as an abstract idea, artificially pieced together; but as a living whole. So it is that nature again unites in the life of the State what, by the creation of a multitude of individuals, she had put asunder. Reason is one, and its manifestation in the world of sense is one also; mankind is a single organised and self-organising whole, the creation of reason.

In its first beginnings, mankind was sundered into several independent members. But the constitution of the State, even as a purely natural process, gives an earnest of the suspension of this independence and gradually fuses the various masses of men into organised communities, until the moral law transforms the whole race into one body.

‘The idea here expounded can best be illustrated by that of an organic product of nature; for instance, a tree. Suppose each separate part of a tree to have consciousness and will; then, simply because it desires its own preservation, it is bound to will that of the tree, seeing that its own preservation is possible only under that condition. What then is the tree to such a part of it? It is nothing but a mere idea, and an idea cannot be injured. What the part really desires is that of all the other parts which go to make up the tree, not one, however small, shall be injured; for an injury done to any one brings loss also to itself. It is not so with a heap of sand, to any single grain of which it would be perfectly indifferent if the other grains were torn from it, trodden under foot or scattered.

‘It is the whole, therefore—the whole, formed in this way—that needs protection. The whole is that second party to the contract, of which we are in search. The will declared in the contract is, accordingly, no private will—save in a preliminary fashion, so far as relates to the individual who forms the other party to the contract, and who, according to our theory, is challenged to give protection to the others; on the contrary, it is, from the nature of the case, a common will and, from the very indeterminateness of the circumstances, it can be nothing else. . . .

‘This image—of an organic life in nature—has often been used of late to express the unity which underlies the different departments of Government; but, so far as I know, it has not yet been used as a symbol for the whole life of the community. In an organic life every part is what it is in virtue of its connection with the rest; apart from that connection, it would not be what it is; indeed, apart from all forms of organic connection, it would be nothing at all; for, without the interaction of organic forces, maintaining themselves in mutual equilibrium, there would be no permanent life but only an eternal conflict between being and not being—a result which is absolutely inconceivable. In the same way, it is only as a member of the community that man attains a definite place in the series of living things, a resting-point in the flux of nature; and no man attains this definite place as against other men and against nature except in virtue of this definite relation to the whole. Apart from this relation, the individual would only be capable of enjoying the passing moment and not of the smallest calculation upon the future; and with the knowledge that there were always others of the same

nature as ourselves who had the same right to enjoy, even this fleeting enjoyment would be haunted by a sense of wrong. Nature is constituted by the organic union of all her forces; humanity by the organic union of all individual wills.

'The essence of inorganic nature, which is itself only conceivable side by side with organic nature and as a part of the organic whole, consists in this, that there is no part of it which does not carry the ground of its determination in itself, no part whose natural qualities (*Triebe*) are not fully explained by its being and its being by its natural qualities. The essence of organic nature, on the other hand, consists in this, that there is no part of it which carries the ground of its determination in itself, no part whose impulses (*Triebe*) do not involve an existence outside of itself and whose existence does not involve an impulse outside of itself. The relation between man as an isolated being and man as a citizen is the same. The former acts solely to satisfy his wants, and he can satisfy none of them except through his own action; what he is in his outward relations he is purely through himself. The latter, on the contrary, has much both to do and to leave undone not for his own sake but for others; and, on the other hand, his highest needs are satisfied, without any doing of his own, by the action of others. Every part of his organic body contributes perpetually to the maintenance of the whole and, by so doing, secures its own also. There is a like relation between the citizen and the State. Indeed there is as little need in the one case as in the other of a separate organisation for the maintenance of the whole. Let every part, every citizen, only maintain himself in the place determined for him through the life of the whole, and by so doing he will bear his part in the maintenance of the whole. On the other hand, by the very fact of maintaining each part in its own place, the whole returns into itself and maintains itself also.' <sup>1</sup>

It is clear enough that the writer is here struggling with a conception of which he does not grasp the full force and which he is not entirely able to work out. He is obviously hampered by the necessity of dragging in the theory of contract and that independence of the individual upon his surroundings which it inevitably involves. The result is that the analogy between the individual and the part of a natural organism, between the State and the organic whole, does not hold water. The whole object of that analogy is to show that the life of the individual is dependent on that of the State and the life of the State on that of its individual members. The upshot of the preceding enquiry is to show, if not exactly the reverse, at any rate that the two are so far independent of each other as to make any comparison between them and the life of a natural

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iii. 202-4, 207-8.

organism entirely unmeaning. The premisses of Fichte, in fact, will not bear out his conclusion. He jumps to an issue which his argument will not sustain.

It is seldom, however, that a great thinker at once grasps the full bearing of his own ideas. And in speculation, as in action, it is the first step that costs. There is much hesitation in Fichte's statement, and much obvious contradiction. But it remains true that in the image of the natural organism is found the germ of all that has been most fruitful in subsequent political speculation. It forecasts the idea that dominates the work of Hegel and of Comte; and Fichte himself, in his later work, did much, more perhaps than is generally acknowledged, to unfold its true significance. It is this that makes the *Grundlage* so memorable a landmark in the history of political thought.

We now pass from the *Grundlage* to a work which, following it within four years, is avowedly little more than an 'appendix' to it—the *Geschlossener Handelsstaat* of 1800. The main theme of this piece, which Fichte reckoned to be 'the best and the most accurately thought out' of all his writings, is economical; it purports to apply the principles of the *Grundlage* to questions of property and finance. It is not, however, with the details of the work, interesting as they are, that we are here concerned, but only with its general bearings upon Fichte's theory of the State.

On the whole it must be said that the claim of the *Handelsstaat* to start from the same principles as the *Grundlage* is fully justified. The details are naturally filled in at greater length; some points, which are merely thrown out as suggestions in the earlier treatise, are declared—and, for that matter, with justice—to be essential parts of the theory in the later. There is perhaps only one question on which the two treatises show any substantial variation. That, however, is a question of the first importance. It concerns the origin of property.

In the *Grundlage*, Fichte is still to some extent hampered by the mechanical theories of property which formed the common stock of eighteenth-century writers. Property is still to him, in the first instance, property in the soil. No doubt, this view is carefully guarded and limited. It is property not so much in the soil as in the fruits of the soil that Fichte has in mind. That at once disposes of the proprietor's claim to let his ground run wild at discretion. If he does so, Fichte argues, the right of property at once reverts to the State; seeing that the ground was only granted by the State for a certain purpose and that purpose, *ex hypothesi*, is not being fulfilled. Again the term 'fruits of the soil' is taken in the strictly conventional sense. It is confined to what grows from the earth in the course of the seasons, and consequently

excludes the mineral wealth of the ground which, in Fichte's view, must either be reserved by the State for public use or else be made the subject of a separate grant. Nor is this an arbitrary distinction. Like that mentioned before, it springs naturally from the two principles which underlie the whole conception of property expounded in the *Grundlage*; the principle that all property implies obligations to others as well as rights on the part of the owner, and the principle that it is the business of the State to see that these obligations are carried out, and to impose such restrictions as seem advisable for that purpose. Like all other rights, property is not conceivable except in the State; the very attribution of it to the individual implies the recognition of other individuals, forming part of the same community and holding property under it, as well.

This clearly marks an advance upon the individualist theory of ownership accepted in the *Beiträge*. At the same time, ownership still remains in great measure bound to the soil, and with something of the immobility, both literal and metaphorical, which it is hard to dissociate from such a bond. This appears plainly enough in the passage which forms the introduction to this section of the *Grundlage*: 'In the contract of ownership a sphere is assigned to the individual for the exercise of his freedom—a sphere, and nothing more. This sphere contains certain objects, determined by the extent of the freedom permitted to him. So far therefore as that freedom reaches, so far and no further does the ownership in those objects extend. He receives them exclusively for a certain use; and it is only from this use and from any course of action which impedes him in this use that he has the right to exclude any other person. A certain definite activity is the object of the contract of ownership.'<sup>1</sup>

The closing words of this passage, curiously enough, point the way to the modification adopted by Fichte in the *Handelstaat*. There it is no longer a 'sphere of objects' that is assigned to the citizen for the exercise of his freedom, but a 'sphere of activity.' The difference in practical application is perhaps not very great, but the distinction is significant. It marks the final disentanglement of Fichte from the feudal view of property—and eventually also of citizenship—as vested in the soil. It likewise marks his final escape from that belief in property as the absolute right of the individual which, in practice though doubtless not in theory, was so closely bound up with feudal traditions and which, largely under the influence of those traditions, the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had taken over without much serious examination. It is no longer an 'object' to which the individual has a right of ownership, however limited, but only the use of his own

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iii. p. 210.

energies under the sanction of the State. The right of property is detached from all things outward and material; it is confined to the free exercise of the individual's activities; and even that free exercise is limited by his obligations towards others and to the community at large. No doubt this was the conclusion towards which Fichte was working even at the moment when the *Grundlage* was written; but he had not yet found the complete and logical expression for it; that was reached only with the publication of the *Geschlossener Handelstaat*.

This difference apart, the two treatises may fairly, so far as they cover the same ground, be taken as one; and all that remains is to sketch shortly the view of property which they embody.

The right of property is not given by 'formation'; a man is not entitled, that is, to possess a given object from the fact that he has spent a certain amount, or a certain kind, of labour upon it. There is always a previous question: how did he acquire the right to spend that labour—how did he become entitled to exercise his power of formation? The right must be based on deeper ground than formation, or it is not proved to be a right at all. The right of property, in fact, like all other rights, must be traced to the fundamental qualities of human nature; it must be shown to be necessary to the full and healthy development of man's character and reason; or the attempt to establish it must be abandoned altogether.

Such a base is secured if we regard the right of property as the right of the individual to the free play of all his faculties and energies; subject, however, to the condition under which all his rights are put in force; the condition, namely, that the exercise of his powers must not interfere with the like exercise of their powers on the part of others. Thus, like all other rights, property contains both a positive and a negative element; the former springing directly from the primary needs and nature of the individual; the latter springing indirectly indeed from the same source—for a limit too is necessary to the growth of man—but directly from the fact that man can only be conceived as member of a community and that such membership inevitably carries with it restrictions upon individual licence and individual caprice. The essence of property accordingly is to secure a certain field, to set apart a definite sphere, for the free play of the individual's activities; and that cannot be done without setting apart a like, though not necessarily an equal, sphere for the activities of others. But logic and justice—and justice is but logic translated into terms of action—make it impossible to deny to one man what is given to another.

Thus the primary need supplied by the institution of property



is to furnish an outlet—and, so far as it goes, that is, so far as the outer world of nature reaches, the only possible outlet—for the activity of the individual's will. The first step in securing such an outlet—the first condition necessary to the assertion, or even to the creation, of the right—is therefore for the individual to declare his will to possess such and such a sphere of activity; and this, from the nature of the case, can take no other form than the exercise, in some definite shape, of the faculties either of his body or his mind. And if the individual could be conceived—which, except as a pure abstraction, he cannot—as existing apart from other individuals, apart, that is, from a community more or less fully organised, there the matter would stop. The right, though an imperfect one, would, so far, be valid. But, to make the right perfect, something further is needed; and that is supplied by the conditions of human life, as we know it. No individual can stand purely as an individual; each exists only as member of a community, on which he has many claims and to which he has many obligations. A right, whether to property or to any other privilege, is made perfect only by a mutual recognition of these claims and obligations. It begins in the needs and nature of the individual; but it is not completed till it has received the sanction of other individuals, and been accorded in due measure to them no less than to him. It is a right against, and at the same time in common with, other men. It is not a right against nature nor, except incidentally, to the objects of the natural world.

It follows from this view that the right of property extends just as much to the artist's use of his imagination or the artisan's of his skill as to the squire's enjoyment of his park or the parson's of his glebe. And, just as the State, in the interest of all its members, has the right to limit the number of those who possess land within its borders, so it is entitled, and indeed bound, to limit the number of those who live by their hands or by their head. In either case, this right on the part of the State is the counterpart of its duty to provide for the maintenance of its members, each one of whom, both by 'nature' and by contract, has an absolute right not only to live, but to live as befits a man, not only to bare livelihood, but to some kind of dignity and comfort.<sup>1</sup> Hence it is that in any well-ordered State there must be a clear separation of class from class, of the producers from the 'artists,' of both from the middlemen or merchants, and, finally, of all these from those responsible either for the government of the community or for the instruction—understanding that word in the widest sense—of its members. Unless such a separation be made and maintained, it is impossible for the State to secure the decent livelihood of those

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iii. p. 422.

who form it; and the moment a livelihood is denied to any one of them, he becomes entitled to declare war upon the community or to withdraw from it altogether. The first condition of the social contract is broken; his hand is justly against every man, because the hand of every man is against him.<sup>1</sup>

Again, as the State has the right to control the income of its members, so it has both the right and the duty to regulate their expenditure. It may pass sumptuary laws to limit the use of luxuries; it is bound to impose a *maximum* price upon the necessities of life and to enforce the *maximum* by penalties. It is the latter duty which leads Fichte, by a logical necessity, to the particular provision which, with the fullest development of detail, forms the subject of the *Geschlossener Handelstaat*. It had already been hinted in the *Grundlage*, as a counsel of perfection;<sup>2</sup> it was reserved for the *Handelstaat* to lay it down as a first principle of good government. This is the provision by which all foreign trade is shut out from the State and the members of the community confined to trade among themselves. That, in Fichte's view, is the only method by which any community can assure itself of the constant power to obtain the necessities of life at a reasonable price. And, given his premisses of a *maximum* and of a currency with no intrinsic value, there is no escape from the conclusion that the commerce of every State ought to be rigorously self-contained. This conclusion Fichte works out to the minutest detail. There is no consequence of his system, however startling, from which he shrinks. Not Saint Just, armed with the guillotine, not Napoleon with the Milan and Berlin Decrees, could have shown more completely the courage of his convictions.

It is, indeed, impossible to read the *Handelstaat* without feeling how deep was the influence of the French Revolution upon its argument. There would be little exaggeration in saying that it gives the theory of the policy which, with many shortcomings and many inconsistencies, the Committee of Public Safety had attempted to work out in practice. The sumptuary laws, the *maximum*, the penalties for enforcing it, the forced currency, the ideal of a State self-contained and self-sufficient, all these had their counterpart during the stormy years of the Reign of Terror. And, as it looks backward to the experiments of the Revolution, so the *Handelstaat* offers a curious foretaste of the commercial policy of Napoleon. It is inspired by the events of the immediate past; it forecasts those of the immediate future.

The most significant thing in all this is not that Fichte should have caught up so many of the social and political remedies prevalent in his day—a weaker intellect than his would have

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iii. p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 235.

sufficed for this—but that he should have shown so clear an insight into the disease which they were intended to relieve. What to the practical statesmen of his day, to Robespierre or Napoleon, were mere expedients, are to Fichte integral parts of a consistent and deeply calculated system which, both in gross and in detail, is aimed against the most inveterate fallacies of current political thought and the most crying evils of modern civilisation. By the proposals of the *Handelstaat* he hoped to cut off once for all the constant occasions for war arising from the commercial rivalry of nations and their consequent craving for territorial aggrandisement. One more war, he seems to have thought—one Armageddon of Christendom—and the ‘natural boundaries’<sup>1</sup> of nations would be settled for ever. The people of Europe might beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks. The occupation of standing armies, the scourge of recent civilisation, would be gone.

In the same way the veiled war, the struggle for existence, that goes on within the borders of every modern nation, would be brought to an end. The ruinous competition, which results in the misery and brutalisation of the many for the enrichment and almost equal brutalisation of the few, would necessarily cease. And with it would cease the crime which is inevitably prompted by misery and, in most cases, by nothing else. There would be peace within our borders as well as without.

No one will maintain that Fichte has not here laid his finger on what are indeed the gravest sores of modern civilisation; and few will deny that, on the whole, they have grown worse rather than better during the century that has passed between his time and ours. The remedies he suggests may be unworkable; they will clearly seem so to any one who is not a socialist; but at least he deserves the credit belonging to the man who is among the first to discover the existence and nature of a great practical evil and to point out the speculative source from which it springs. As on the one hand he anticipates Carlyle, so on the other he is the forerunner of Hegel, of Comte and of Mazzini.

For on the speculative source of the evil, on the mistaken view of man's nature from which it flows, Fichte is no less explicit than on the practical usages that it inflicts. So far as the dealings of one nation with another go, the evil springs from the ingrained materialism which believes the greatness of a State to consist in self-assertion, in bulk of territory, in conquest and in nothing else. And in the same way, when we turn to the inward life of nations,

<sup>1</sup> How different a sense this phrase bore to Fichte from what it bears to the minds of most men at the present day, may be seen by a reference to Fichte's *Werke*, iii. pp. 480-4.

we find the practical evils that poison it to flow from that mistaken conception of individual freedom which prefers the excitement of hazard to an assured livelihood with the restrictions and the obligations to others that it necessarily involves. In other words, the real abuses of modern civilisation are due to the exaltation of the individual at the expense of the community, to the desire for living at the caprice of the moment rather than by any fixed principle, however advantageous and however just.

It is because it deals so heavy a blow at this idolatry of the individual that the *Geschlossener Handelstaat* is important in the history of political thought.

The strange thing is that, having carried his protest so far as he does in the *Grundlage* and the *Handelstaat*, Fichte should at that time have carried it no further. He still, in the latter no less than in the former treatise, hampers himself with the theory of contract; a theory which, as we have seen, has no meaning except as the expression of a fixed belief in the sacredness of individual rights. He still insists on the absolute cleavage between the spheres of morals and of politics, which again has no meaning except upon the same assumption. At the same time he limits, or rather tramples upon, the rights of the individual with such vigour—his whole theory of the State is so coloured by what cannot practically be distinguished from moral considerations—as, in effect though not in intention, to deprive both his assertion of contract and his divorce between morals and politics of all significance. Each has become little more than an unmeaning formula. And with the next step forward—a step that a man so ceaselessly active could not fail to take—he was bound to fling away the last remnants of the theories inherited from his forerunners and to throw himself without reserve upon the path in which he was to lead the way for his successors. This step was accomplished in the *Staatslehre*,<sup>1</sup> which belongs to the last months of his short and eager life.

The *Staatslehre*, like the *Handelstaat*, is deeply coloured by the experience of the hour. One of the most striking chapters in it is a digression on 'the idea of a just war,'<sup>2</sup> and one of the most notable passages in that chapter is an unsparing and most subtle analysis of the character of Napoleon.<sup>3</sup> The whole treatise breathes the very spirit of the war of liberation. It reflects, as on the other hand it did much to inspire, the ideals with which that war was waged by the German people and in the strength of which they conquered. Few books do more to illustrate that connection between theory and practice, between the development of political thought and of

<sup>1</sup> The full title of the treatise is *Die Staatslehre, oder über das Verhältniss des Urstaates zum Vernunftreiche*.

<sup>2</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. pp. 401-30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* pp. 424-30.

historical tradition, to assert which, however imperfectly, was one of the many services rendered by Fichte in this, the closing stage of his life's work. Throughout these stirring months, the war of liberation was treated by Fichte not merely as an end in itself but as a means, and the only possible means, by which Germany, first among modern nations, could realise the true conception of the State.

The *Staatslehre* begins with a more uncompromising statement of the idealist principles underlying all Fichte's work than is to be found in any other of his political writings; and the note of defiance thus struck in the opening pages of the treatise is carried onwards to the end. It is as if, having at last cleared his theory of its mechanical elements, he for the first time felt the ground sure under his feet and stood prepared to meet the whole world in arms for the defence of a system which he knew to be consistent with itself and which he confidently believed would bring satisfaction both to the intellect of men and to their practical needs and aspirations. The twelve years which had passed since his last formal deliverance on political questions had left a deep mark upon his thought, as upon his character; and something of the prophetic strain, which to many of his hearers must have been already familiar from the popular courses<sup>1</sup> delivered by him in the meantime, makes itself heard as a constant undertone throughout the *Staatslehre*.

What then is the advance in argument which justifies this tone of increased confidence? What are the precise changes that distinguish the *Staatslehre* from the two treatises which preceded it?

In the first place, the doctrine of contract, which had clogged the steps of Fichte from the beginning, is silently dropped; and, with it, that lingering belief in the absolute right of the individual to determine whether he shall live as member of a community or no, which had involved his earlier writings in so many inconsistencies. A significant illustration of this change of front is to be found in his altered attitude towards Rousseau. In the *Grundlage* he had, with perfect justice, insisted upon the more fruitful side of Rousseau's speculations; he had gone out of his way to identify his own doctrine of justice—as not the result obtained by counting heads but the course to which the reason of all men inevitably points, as not the individual but the universal element in the mind and will of man—with the *volonté générale* of the French writer.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Namely, *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, delivered at Berlin in 1804-5; and *Die Reden an die deutsche Nation*, also delivered at Berlin in 1807-8, the former shortly before, and the latter shortly after, the crushing disaster of Jena (Oct. 1806).

<sup>2</sup> [Fichte's *Werke*, iii. pp. 106-7. See also the note at the end of this chapter.—Ed.]

In the *Staatslehre*, on the contrary, and with some want of fairness, he entirely ignores all that Rousseau had both said and implied in this direction, describing his conception of right as 'that on which men agree purely as a matter of caprice,' and the *Contrat Social* itself as 'a hap-hazard grubbing over speculative questions without speculative principles—empirical, arbitrary, fanciful.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, so far, in the zeal of his conversion, does Fichte carry his war against the individual as to find no origin for society save in the armed force, backed by the spiritual terrors, of a superior race, and no government save in the unlimited power of a providential dictator. Compulsion, which in the earlier treatise was only slipped in at a back-door, is now enthroned in the very heart of his political system. The only check on the power of the dictator lies in the tender mercies of his own conscience; and that, as we all know, is a conscience that is little likely to make a coward of him. 'To compel men,' Fichte writes, 'to adopt the rightful form of government, to impose Right on them by force, is not only the right but the sacred duty of every man who has both the insight and the power to do so. There may even be circumstances in which the single man has this right against the whole of mankind; for, as against him and Right, there is no man who has either rights or liberty. He may compel them to *Right*, that being an absolutely definite conception, valid for all men alike; a conception which they all ought to have and which they all will have as soon as they raise themselves to his level of intelligence, and which, in the meantime, thanks to the grace of God working in him, he holds in the name of all and as their representative. The truth of this conception he must take upon his own conscience. He, we may say, is the compulsive power, ordained of God.'<sup>2</sup> Fichte, in fact, was the first notable writer to preach the doctrine of Hero-worship; and no one, who is aware of the deep influence his writings exercised upon Carlyle, will be disposed to doubt that, in this instance as in so many others, the English moralist drew directly from his inspiration.

And, as the theory of contract and individual rights finally vanishes from the *Staatslehre*, so also does the divorce between politics and morals. It had, as we have seen, been among the chief services rendered by Fichte in his earlier writings to insist that this divorce, assumed tacitly by his predecessors, was in fact the inevitable consequence of the doctrine of individual rights. It was the still greater service of his later years to make it clear beyond all dispute that the abandonment of individual rights left the exclusion of moral considerations from politics without meaning and without justification. Nothing indeed could be more emphatic than the assertion, repeated again and again in the course of the *Staatslehre*

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 436.

and implied in every link of its argument, that 'the law of Right is essentially a moral principle.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, that which in Fichte's own view had formed the chief point of distinction between the *Grundlage* and other theories of political philosophy is explicitly thrown over, and he hastens to recast his whole conception of politics in the light of the new truth that had broken upon him. A slight sketch of the treatise, in its main outlines, will show how complete was the change of front thus quietly brought about.

The world as known to thought—so Fichte opens his final statement of political philosophy—is the work of freedom, the free energy of reason; of the divine reason, in the first instance; of human reason, as (however imperfectly) reflecting and embodying the reason of God, in the second place. When man observes nature, he is not a passive recipient of something given to him in 'sense'; he is projecting his own activity, the energy of his own reason—which, in its turn, is but the shadow of the divine reason—beyond himself; he is not receptive but creative.<sup>2</sup> And if this is true of the world of knowledge, still more obviously is it true of the world of action. That is the creation of the free will, or it is nothing. And no action which is not the expression of freedom in this sense—which is not the embodiment of an end consciously and deliberately pursued by the individual, and determined by his higher reason—deserves to be called action at all.<sup>3</sup>

Freedom of will, however, can mean one of two things. It can mean, as it meant above, the liberation of the individual from his own baser self, his purely natural instincts and promptings. Or it can mean freedom from the interference of others, the removal of all those obstacles which beset the realisation of internal or moral freedom from without. The two are separate in thought, being related, we may say, as the end to the means; but in practice, as indeed follows necessarily from such a relation, they are inseparable. It is only if the outward conditions are favourable that inward freedom can be attained. It is only because they enable him to win inward freedom that the outward conditions of man's life are worthy of his thought.<sup>4</sup>

Now the object of political philosophy—of what, for the first time, Fichte significantly calls *Staatslehre*, the theory of the State—is to define the outward sphere of freedom; in his own words, to 'set forth the outward conditions, those imposed by the world of man as we know it, under which moral freedom is to be achieved.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See especially Fichte's *Werke*, iv. pp. 392, 394, 419, 432.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* pp. 370-82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* pp. 382-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* pp. 390-2.

<sup>5</sup> 'Die äusseren, in der gegebenen Welt liegenden Bedingungen der sittlichen Freiheit darzustellen' (*ib.* p. 390).

If there were only one Will in the world, there could be no outward obstacle to its freedom. There are, however, more wills than one, all of them free and all therefore liable to come into conflict with each other. Hence it is that there arise obstacles and limitations to man's freedom. And, as the limitations arise from moral causes, from the action of the free will of other men, so it is only by the working of the moral law that they can be removed. The name for the moral law in this connection, as that which regulates the outward sphere of freedom, is the law of Right.<sup>1</sup>

In theory this law is the same for all time and in all places; since, strictly speaking, it is only when it is completely realised that Right can be said to be at all. But in practice we have to recognise that the law of Right has varied from age to age and from people to people. It is only through long ages of struggle that it has developed itself even so far as it can be said to have done at the present day. And that, as all will acknowledge, is far enough from the ideal. Existing embodiments of it, the constitutions of all known states—past as well as present—are in fact no better than makeshifts.<sup>2</sup> The only value they have comes from the fact that they may be made the stepping-stones to something better. The idea of Right, therefore, like all other ideas applied to the life of man, has a history. Each link in its development is conditioned by all that have gone before and is itself the condition of all that are to follow. The statesman is he who has the insight to perceive what is the next step needed under the given circumstances of his own community. The philosopher looks farther and foresees the more distant stages of the road mankind must traverse in striving towards the ultimate realisation of the ideal.<sup>3</sup>

Right, then, as we know it, is limited by circumstances and by time. It is an historical growth, and is bound by historical conditions. Among the most clearly marked of those conditions is the clustering of mankind into separate communities, each of which has its own language, its own traditions, its own past and, consequently, its own future. For each nation Right is indissolubly bound up with its separate being; each nation is therefore bound to defend that being to the last drop of its blood against oppression or extinction at the hands of others. Right for it is its own tradition of Right, or it is nothing. Should that tradition be broken by foreign tradition or by conquest, Right for it is lost; for it is stripped of that freedom which is the essential condition of Right, the material in which Right of necessity must work.<sup>4</sup>

This, then, is the first consequence of Fichte's admission that the conception of Right has grown up in time. It lives by progress,

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nothverfassungen,' *ib.* p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 394.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* pp. 412-20.



and that progress is bound up with nationality. And this at once raises the further question: How did the conception of Right first come into being? What were the earliest stages of its development, and how did it come to be generally accepted?

In answering these questions Fichte is brought face to face with the difficulties which lay at the root of his whole system. He makes no serious attempt to bridge the gulf between thought and fact, between the idea of Right and its realisation in time. Just as, in the speculative groundwork of his philosophy, he is unable to account for the transition from the self to the not-self, and therefore unable to furnish pure thought with any legitimate contact; so, in his political theory, he is unable to show how the conception of Right is brought home to barbarous communities, how the idea takes flesh in definite institutions. In his theory of being he is driven, under the thin disguise of a teleological machinery, to fill the blank form of thought with a merely empirical content. In his theory of Right, after the same fashion, he passes abruptly from the abstract conception of justice—a conception avowedly independent of all time and all circumstance; a conception, further, which, in his own words, is 'still entirely unknown'—to the crude beginnings of civil society, the rough endeavours made by primitive ages to beat down the natural barbarism of man and to raise him above the level of the beasts. The history of Fichte has no connection with his philosophy; and it is only by the invention of an imaginary law, an untimely revival of the State of Nature, that even a semblance of connection is established. He starts with an imperfect philosophy; and a false history is pressed into the service to support it. Let us briefly trace the stages by which this process is worked out.

There are, Fichte urges, two distinct worlds, and two only, revealed by thought: the world of *nature* and the world of freedom. As a link in the purely physical world, as a mere animal, man belongs to the former; but in so far as he is capable of action, he ceases to do so. As an agent he is delivered from that blind subjection to a law given from without, which is the mark of nature. He is either prompted by caprice—in which case he is subject to no law at all. Or else he is governed by reason, by the moral law; and in that case he is a law unto himself. In either case, nature, whether outside of him or within his own heart, is merely the lifeless matter upon which he works; he is her master, and she his servant to do his bidding.<sup>1</sup>

This is the sphere of individual activity; it is also that of the activity of mankind. In the latter sense it supplies, of course, the matter of history; of history, not as the record of individual lives

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. pp. 460-2.

and individual exploits—for 'that is a thing of no significance'—but as the reasoned statement of the development of the race. Hitherto, however, the history of mankind has been for the most part the record of action in the lower sense; of action on no reasoned principle and with no determined end. It has been mainly the work of chance. It supplies no more than the material on which reason may at some future time put forth its activity so as to mould it to its own purpose; or, at the very most, it supplies the means towards the realisation of an end which the human agent can in no sense be said to have set before him.<sup>1</sup>

Where, however, is that end to be sought? and how can it be realised except through the will of some conscious agent? If it does not, in some sense, exist as an end in the will of one or more individuals, is it not mockery to say that it exists at all? These difficulties can only be met if we assume that from the dawn of human history there has always been some small number—perhaps some favoured race, or races—of men who by a happy instinct have naturally followed the law of reason without pausing to ask themselves how or why it was they did so. This will supply at once the goodwill, without which there can be no moral action 'in the world or out of it,' and a core of moral influence which, slowly but surely, may mould the destinies of all mankind. It will furnish both the form and the matter of human progress; the form, in so far as it gives a channel by which, in the shape of instinct, the moral law can find a lodgment in the experience of men; the matter, in so far as the many, who are themselves without that instinct, are gradually compelled, whether by dint of awe or of force, to bow before the few who have it; to accept, however reluctantly, their guidance; to yield to what Rousseau aptly called the 'compulsion to be free.'<sup>2</sup>

All history, then, is summed up in one point. It is the record of one struggle; the story of one unceasing conflict between two principles; between reason—for, under the form of blind faith, it is still reason, still the creative faculty, the ideal instinct—on the one hand and criticism—the craving to understand everything, to force faith to explain itself, to compel it to give the ground of its dogmas—upon the other. Each of these principles, so far at least as the early stages of history are concerned, is embodied in a separate class—and it would be more accurate to say a separate race—of the community. And it is upon the conflict between these races that progress, in the first instance of individual nations, then of mankind at large, depends.<sup>3</sup>

But in what does this progress consist; what exactly is the

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. pp. 462-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* pp. 464-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* pp. 470-7, 486-96.

course of the conflict; to which of the two races is progress entrusted; which of them therefore must we desire to conquer and, in conquering, to convince the other of its error? To the question, so put, there can be but one answer. From its very blindness, faith is a stationary principle; it can never advance; its triumph would for ever bar the road to progress. Criticism, on the other hand, though it may originate nothing, can at least drag into clear consciousness the ideas which lie dark and confused behind the instinctive utterances of faith. In so doing, it will no doubt correct them, prune them, change their form in a thousand ways. If left to hold its course unchecked, it would eventually destroy them altogether.<sup>1</sup> That, however, is not to be. Criticism, like faith, profoundly alters its nature in the struggle. It may enter the conflict as a purely negative principle; its primary instinct may be to rebel against all authority, to assert the absolute freedom of the individual, his immunity from all law, whether in matters of speculation or in those of conduct. But the discipline of time brings a change. In conquering its antagonist, criticism gradually takes to itself something of his spirit. It still abides by the resolve to accept nothing which it does not clearly understand. It still therefore represents the principle of freedom as against that of blind submission to authority. But, in questioning the decrees of faith, while it has rejected many of them, it has come to accept others and at the same time to understand them far better than they are understood by faith itself. While retaining their substance, it has for the first time given to their substance an adequate and worthy form. By fusing itself with faith, it has raised both faith and itself to a higher level. The higher region in which each for the first time moves freely, because each has lost its own stiff identity, is that of reason; the reason which is so in form as well as content; drawing, as it does, its form from the obstinate resolve to prove all things which was the mark of criticism, while it retains the ideal content, the sense of coming from a higher world and still living in it, which was the stamp of faith. The two elements which, in the beginning, of necessity dwelt stubbornly apart are at length united; after ages of conflict, the fruits of progress are assured.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Dass, wenn der Glaube allein herrscht, kein Fortgang sey, haben wir schon gesehen. . . . Das aber ist der Fortgang der Geschichte, dass immerfort der Verstand Feld gewinne über den Glauben, so lange bis der erste den letzten ganz vernichtet und seinen Inhalt aufgenommen hat in die edlere Form der klaren Einsicht' (Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 493).

<sup>2</sup> 'In dieser Vereinigung konnte nicht unterjochen, überwinden, bestimmen das zweite Geschlecht das erste: denn dann wäre überhaupt nur das zweite übrig geblieben, darum keine Ordnung und Gesetz: es

Yet let it not be supposed that—even for any single nation, still less for mankind at large—the struggle is yet over. Far from it. Of the five epochs into which the history of man naturally falls, two only are completed. These are the age of unquestioned faith and that in which the authority of faith is first assailed by criticism and doubt. The third age—the triumph of the critical understanding, the era of individual licence—is not yet at an end. The dawn of the fourth—that in which the fusion of the two hostile elements at length begins, in which the final issue of the struggle declares itself for the inner world of thought and theory—may be faintly traced upon the horizon. The fifth, when theory shall be converted into practice, when the science of reason is destined to pass into an art, not the privilege of the favoured few but the native heritage of the many, is still far in the future. We may predict its coming with certainty—could we not do so, the world would be the sport of chance—but its time is not yet.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the triumph of criticism is not, as at first appeared, an unqualified triumph. It loses much, as well as takes much, in the struggle. In one sense, indeed, it would be true to say that the world ends substantially at the point where it began; that the result of human history is to work out in terms of the critical understanding what, to the first ages, was given in terms of instinct and of faith; and consequently that, in the final reckoning, the wisdom of divine instinct is justified from the mouth of criticism itself.<sup>2</sup> That, however, only proves that in the last issue satisfaction is given to each of the two primary instincts of mankind. Freedom, the blank form of human Right, may be sacrificed for a time; but only on condition that authority wields its power for no other end save to compel men to be free. Discipline, obedience to man's better self—the substance of all Right—may be banished for whole centuries; but only in order to teach men that, if it be not ultimately willing, obedience is nothing; that Right itself, if it be not finally recognised as Right, has only half done its work and is still half way towards a wrong. On this condition, compulsion is rightful and, as a step in the training of mankind, it is even indis-

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wäre überhaupt der Untergang erfolgt. Wohl aber umgekehrt muss das erste Geschlecht bestimmen das zweite, jedoch mit Beibehaltung seiner Freiheit' (Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 489).

<sup>1</sup> See *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (particularly Erste Vorlesung): Fichte's *Werke*, vii. pp. 3-254. Compare *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (*ib.* p. 264).

<sup>2</sup> 'Die Menschheit erbaut in einem zweiten Geschlechte sich selbst zu dem, was sie in einem ersten schon uranfänglich war, das gegebene Seyn zum Producte der eigenen Freiheit machend' (Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 488).

pensable. If this lesson be learnt, no momentary sacrifice of discipline, not even if the moments be prolonged into years and centuries, is too great.

Such is a summary sketch of Fichte's philosophy of Right, his theory of the State, in its final form and of the philosophy of History which it carries with it. Few will deny that a broad line has to be drawn between its letter and its spirit, between the fundamental conception that it embodies and the form in which that conception is expressed. The latter, doubtless, both as philosophy and as history is crude enough; the former represents an immeasurable advance upon the results both of earlier thinkers and of Fichte's own previous speculation. That Fichte should have severed the last link that bound him to the abstract theories of the past is a memorable achievement; that he should have boldly thrown himself upon the alternative course and pursued the historical method with a will which, if wanting in discretion, at any rate shows no lack of zeal, is a service still more decisive. The design is great, the execution lamentably imperfect.

In the last resort, however, all these imperfections may be clearly traced to one source—to a false conception of man's reason, and consequently of the manner in which that reason takes shape in historical institutions. The falseness of this conception lies firstly in the perverse antithesis, itself inherited from Kant, between the reason and the critical understanding. Fichte, like Kant, still holds the two terms absolutely apart. To him, as to Kant, they still represent two different, and indeed hostile, faculties of the soul. Whatever is affirmed by the one is instantly denied by the other. An impassable gulf is fixed between them; yet, impassable as it is, that gulf must be bridged, or the argument is not advanced by a single step. But to accomplish this was a task beyond all human ingenuity. And the result is that the same breach of continuity, which we have already noticed in Fichte's abrupt transition from the abstract idea of the moral law to its earliest manifestation in time, reappears—it is difficult to say whether under a harsher or a milder form—in his account of the later stages of its historical development.

And, if we ask what was the ultimate reason of this failure, the answer must be: it was because Fichte started with a purely abstract conception of reason, both on its speculative and its practical side, both as thought and as will, that he was unable subsequently to establish any vital connection between it and the concrete facts of our experience. The content which he strives to put into it is not drawn naturally from it, but is something alien to it, something forced upon it from without. The consequence is that, in seeking to idealise nature, he only succeeds in

materialising thought; in striving to rationalise history, he only succeeds in derationalising the idea. It was reserved for Hegel to rid speculation of the fatal contradiction which had haunted it from the days of Kant and which, by the very boldness of his attempt to escape from it, Fichte had in fact brought into still clearer evidence.

It is plain, indeed, that the defect of Fichte's whole argument lies in his inability to discover any necessary relation between the idea, the moral law, as such, and the struggles of man to realise it either in his own heart or in the institutions of the State. He saw clearly enough that the moral and political life of man has been a history of progress. He saw also that this progress has in fact consisted in a less and less distant approximation to an ideal which may fairly be called the law of reason or of duty. At the same time he saw that even in the present stage of his development, much more in the past and most of all while the fabric of primitive society was being slowly built up of 'iron and blood,' what little man has achieved is utterly imperfect, and that even that little could hardly have been won except by means questionable or worse than questionable. How then, he seems to have asked himself, how can we suppose that an intellect so feeble, and a moral sense so blunt could ever have risen to a conception which makes demands upon the highest faculties of man; and how, without such a conception, could man ever have made even the little progress he has made or lifted himself by a single step above the level of the brutes? How again, to take the matter from the other side, could a conception so exalted ever have been brought to bear upon the squalid, entirely material, facts of life, as we know it?

The truth is, it was because he conceived of the moral law as fixed rather than progressive, as an ideal rather than as an idea, that Fichte was unable to conceive of man as ever, except by miracle, rising to it or ever taking it to himself. And in one point he was right. Unless the moral law be conceived as itself progressive, as something which has developed from beggarly elements in the past and which carries within it the seeds of a growth that defies prediction in the future, it is impossible that man should ever advance by one single step to its realisation. Or, to put the same thing otherwise, if the moral law is conceived as outside of man, as something imposed upon his will rather than springing out of it, it is impossible that it should ever find a foothold within his heart. On his own premisses, the conclusion of Fichte, lame and impotent as it is, is irresistible.

Having thus barred the straight road to the idea of progress, Fichte has no choice but to smuggle it in by a back door. It is

true, he urges, that man, undeveloped and uncivilised, is incapable of conceiving the idea of Right, as an idea. But that does not prove him incapable of grasping it, or 'something very like it,' when it is presented to him in a sensible image, embodied in other beings of like passions with himself, materialised so to speak in them, and forced by them upon him.<sup>1</sup> Hence the doctrine of the superior and dominant race, a doctrine which is as false to history as it is irrelevant to philosophy. It may be of some value in explaining the antiquities of Rome or even of Greece; but, as a 'key to all the histories,' it is utterly without warrant. And, were it true a hundred times as history, it would not serve the speculative purpose for which it is employed. Fichte is still left face to face with the impossibility of overleaping the gulf he had himself fixed between the reality and the ideal. In striving to cancel that impossibility he may be said rather to have doubled it, and instead of filling the gulf he must be thought rather to have deepened it. For how are men, such as Fichte rightly conceives the men of primitive communities to have been, brought any nearer to the ideal because it is presented to them in a sensible form? How, without at once losing its character, could the ideal stoop to be bound by the limits of sense? How can a mere instinct be counted on to do the work of reason? And, if it can, does it not cease to be instinct and become nothing but another name for reason itself?

The whole argument of Fichte, as well as his history, is in fact purely artificial. It merely masks the difficulties of his position and leaves the heart of the matter exactly where it was before. The idea, whether as knowledge or as will, is to him a pure abstraction, a blank form which rebels against the intrusion of any possible content.<sup>2</sup> The attempt to mediate between this blank form and the articulate conception of Right, as it has grown up in Time, was foredoomed to failure. It only serves to throw into yet stronger relief the inherent imperfections of Fichte's whole theory of life and reason, and in particular of his Philosophy of History. Of the former enough has now been said; the latter demands some further examination.

No Philosophy of History can for a moment be regarded as satisfactory which does not find in the facts of history an independent life of their own, which does not draw the principle that

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. pp. 464-74.

<sup>2</sup> 'Das Sittliche ist rein geistig und gestaltlos, *Gesetz* ohne alles Bild. Seine Gestaltung erhält es erst aus dem sittlichen Stoffe:—so haben wir gehört. Nun kann durch ein bildendes Princip, dergleichen das Ich ist, diese Gestaltung geschehen auch nur nach einem Bilde, das es schon *hat*, des Sittlichen' (*ib.* p. 464).

regulates them purely from themselves. On no other understanding does it prove them to be rational or accomplish the task which it professes to perform. Now that is just what Fichte, on his own showing, entirely fails to do. There is doubtless much vacillation in his statement of what history is. But, even if the more favourable interpretation be taken, it still falls far short of what the case requires.

History, Fichte urges, can only be truly rational when the deeds that go to make it are done at the bidding of the moral law—this with him, it must be remembered, is not confined to the duties of the individual, but includes also those of the citizen—and with a full consciousness of the end to which they are directed. But it is notorious that, from the first syllable of recorded time, there is little indeed which has been done on this principle or, to say the truth, on any principle at all.<sup>1</sup> The world, so far as the will and consciousness of men are concerned, has gone by chance; and the only question is whether behind this chance there is any kind of directing principle or no.

There are two ways, and only two, in which such a principle can be conceived as working. It must have worked, if at all, either by the direct intervention of Providence, shaping to its own purpose the ends that man has left rough-hewn; or by an incarnation of the divine will in some man or body of men who, themselves acting not on principle but on instinct, not because they ought but because they must, are yet the chosen channel of communication between God and the mass of mankind, the appointed means through which the will of God is wrought out in history, the leaven by which the whole lump is gradually purged.<sup>2</sup>

It is the latter alternative, as we have seen, that Fichte actually adopts. But it is with some hesitation and in the full consciousness that here too, however much it may be veiled, a miracle is involved. 'If this be so,' he writes, 'it follows that a part of the work of freedom is due to the prompting of individual resolve by a God of reason, wisdom and goodness. Providence, miracle; a miracle resembling a natural event, which is only conceivable if brought about with a moral end and as a means to such an end.'<sup>3</sup>

Nothing could well be more explicit than the admission here made that the rational element in history is essentially miraculous; that in bulk it is a very small element; and that the greater part of the collective life of mankind lies entirely outside its influence. And this is only another way of saying that the principle which

<sup>1</sup> 'Das meiste kommt zu Stande ohne diese Zurückführung auf das sittliche Gesetz, nur nach einem von ungefähr aufgegriffenen Begriffe' (Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 462).

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* pp. 462-70.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 466.



regulates the events of history, so far as they are regulated by any principle at all, is not drawn from them but is imposed upon them from without. Such principle as there is is not inherent, and the great mass of events lies altogether beyond its scope. It is no philosophy of history that Fichte offers, but a natural history of miraculous intervention, an intervention which is as inconceivable in itself as it is capricious and partial in its operation.

The truth is that, little as he may have thought it, the other method of conceiving the work of reason in history, the method mentioned by Fichte only to be rejected, comes much nearer the mark than that which he accepts. It needs only to be freed from its supernatural language and its superstitious associations to represent what seems to be the truth on this, one of the most difficult and far-reaching of all speculative problems. Once admit, what on all grounds is sufficiently obvious, that the individual, however wise and however far-judging, sees but a little way into the inner meaning and the remote issues of the principles on which he acts; once admit that he is constantly calling into play forces the true nature of which it takes years and even centuries to unfold; then, unless we are prepared to say that nothing is rational except what the individual deliberately purposes and consciously accepts as such, unless that is we commit ourselves to the position that the reason of things is to be measured purely by what a given individual or handful of individuals is capable of seeing in them, we are forced to allow that, over and beyond the reason of the individual agent, there is in the action of men a controlling purpose, shaping and it may be overruling events to issues other and wider than those which the individual foresees. Such a purpose, such a principle, is in no sense imposed on the acts, which make up the web of history, from without. On the contrary, it is, in the strictest sense of the word, natural; it springs from the inmost nature of the acts regarded—and so we are bound to regard them—as a collective whole. It is, in fact, their moving principle, the soul of reason within them, in a far more vital sense than the ends, always limited and often purely personal and selfish ends, which the individual agent has found in them or sought to put there.

On the particular manner in which, for a given case, the principle works itself out in detail there is much room for doubt, more perhaps for ignorance. But if man, with his necessarily imperfect knowledge of the facts and his limited power of interpreting even what he knows, is unable to assure himself of the connection between the various parts of a complicated whole, that is no reason for inferring that there is no connection or that a fuller knowledge, while modifying some of his previous conclusions, would not enable him to understand clearly much of *what*

previously was dark. So far as the broader outlines of history are concerned, the connection is already established beyond dispute. Is it reasonable to doubt that it exists also in matters of detail?

What the Philosophy of History has to do is to disclose this connection, to unravel the working of this principle, as widely and as fully as possible; never overstepping the limits of reason and of nature, always toiling with its eye upon the facts and drawing the principle from them and from them alone, always jealously excluding the assumption of special interventions or the intrusion of the supernatural. So understood, the vital principle which underlies the facts of history and manifests itself through them may fairly be called the work of Providence; but only in the sense in which all the forms of reason, whether in nature or in the mind of man, may be so regarded. The Providence of popular superstition, the Providence which is conceived as standing apart from the facts and violently arresting them to some purpose utterly alien to the facts, is one thing. The Providence which is in the facts and which works only in and through the facts, the Providence which is not a 'far-off divine event' but which is 'very nigh us, even in our hearts' and the natural issues of our acts, is quite another. Such, however, it must be admitted, is not the Providence of Fichte.

From his false conception of Providence in history it necessarily followed that Fichte had a false conception of the way in which history—or, to avoid all risk of injustice, the Philosophy of History—should be written. In his view, the business of the philosopher is to approach history not through the facts but *a priori* and from the side—nay, even within the limits—of the idea. The Philosophy of History, on this showing, does not draw its principles from the facts, but arrives at them independently; and, if the facts do not correspond, so much the worse for them.

'The philosopher,' he writes, 'who should set himself the task of describing a given age will look for the idea of that age to a region which is independent of all experience, knowing that, as an idea, it cannot possibly be found in any experience; and he will set forth the various shapes under which it enters into experience as the phenomena which necessarily belong to such an age. In thus setting them forth he will have exhaustively treated the phenomena in the light of the idea and, by grasping their fundamental principle, will have traced their derivation and shown the necessity of their connection with each other. The ordinary historian is the chronicler of the age; it is the philosopher who first makes the true history of the age a possibility.

'But if it is the business of the philosopher to show the derivation of all the possible phenomena of experience from the unity of

the idea with which he starts, then it is clear that, for the accomplishment of this task, he stands in absolutely no need of experience; that he performs it purely as a philosopher and, in so doing, keeps steadily within the limits of philosophy without reference to any experience, working absolutely *a priori*. He must be able to describe *a priori* all time and all possible epochs of history.' <sup>1</sup>

Some hesitation may, no doubt, be traced in the first paragraph of this passage. The language used in the latter half of it needs but little alteration to give apt expression to a truer view of the relation between the idea and the historical fact than that with which Fichte can in fact be credited. But, on the whole, it is abundantly clear that his conception of that relation is not such as can either give satisfaction in itself or be regarded as in any way according with the facts. The idea, to Fichte, is not the soul of the facts, inseparable from them as the soul of man is from his body or the will of man from the concrete form which it takes in resolution; it is an abstract rule arbitrarily imposed upon them from without. And such a view will find as little support from philosophy as from history. Once again, we are confronted with that fatal breach between thought and fact, between the idea and its concrete embodiment, which is the incurable defect in Fichte's whole system of speculation.

What, then, is the precise advance marked by the *Staatslehre* and other works of the same period in the treatment of political theory? What are its limits and what its significance for subsequent enquirers? That Fichte failed in establishing a satisfactory connection between the abstract conception of Right and the concrete institutions in which mankind has striven to embody it is clear enough; and enough has been said as to the causes which stood in the way of his success. It is only just, however, to recognise the solid service he rendered in making the attempt, and the indisputable advance involved in even so imperfect employment of the historical method as is offered by the *Staatslehre*. His practice of that method is better than his theory. And, though much of his history is obviously fantastic, it would be idle to deny that the contrast between the ancient and modern worlds, with which the latter part of the treatise is concerned, contains much truth and much fruitful suggestion. The work of Fichte in this matter forms an important link—we may fairly say, the only link of importance—between that of Vico and Montesquieu on the one hand and that of Hegel on the other.

Again, defective as it is in many points, the conception of progress put forward in at least one passage of the *Staatslehre* stands

<sup>1</sup> *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (Fichte's *Werke*, vii. p. 5).

clearly in advance of anything previously attained. 'The manifestation of God in history,' Fichte writes, 'is life: a life that continuously unfolds itself; an ever fresh and ever creative life. This is its very being; and for that reason it moves forward to ever greater perfection for all time. No stagnation, no backsliding. . . . And that in virtue of the general law which limits the freedom of all free individuals. From this perfectibility it is not within their power to fall. So far, all outward experience to the contrary, their freedom does not extend. This endless advance is not the work of any single individual, but of the inner law which governs all individuals and will continue to govern them to all eternity.'<sup>1</sup>

We have here the idea of progress; of progress according to a fixed law and embracing the action of all mankind, determining that action on the one side as it is determined by it on the other. Such an idea may not be consistent with what Fichte elsewhere says on the same subject. It may—we must rather say, it does—exaggerate the powerlessness of the individual to frustrate the work of reason, his incapacity for turning 'perfectibility' into stagnation or decay. Such exaggerations flow from the miraculous conception of Providence with which he started, as that in its turn flows from the abstract conception of the ideal element in man's soul which poisoned the very source of his whole system of speculation. But the essential thing is that here, for the first time in the records of political thought, an attempt is made not merely to assert progress in the abstract but to show definitely how it has been worked out in the ebb and flow of history; not merely to take note of it as an empirical fact, but to trace it as a law dominating the whole course of human effort; as a spring of life perpetually casting itself forth in new channels, yet for ever taking its source in the eternal and unchanging will of God.

So conceived, the law of progress may fairly be said to go far to satisfy the two main conditions of the case. As a 'manifestation of God,' it is no empirical principle but, in the strictest sense, a law of reason. As a well-spring of 'life,' if we may understand that to mean the life of the nations which take part in the movement of the world's history, it is not a law forced upon the facts from without but one that works in and through them from within. It is at once an ideal law and one which shapes the commonest facts of our experience.

This, doubtless, is an exceptional passage. It cannot be said to represent the main current of Fichte's beliefs even as they were in this, the closing period of his life. It is, moreover, a vague passage and one that, even when the most favourable interpretation has been put upon it, still bears unmistakable traces of those defects

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's *Werke*, iv. p. 472.

which we have already recognised as the weak side of the *Staatslehre* and the kindred works of Fichte. It still shows a deep suspicion of the individual reason; and that is only another way of saying that the writer was still unable to perceive any vital and organic connection between the life of the individual and that of the collective whole. The two are still regarded as to some extent independent of each other, in some measure hostile to each other.

Thus, at the close of his life, Fichte is still haunted by the abstract conception on the one hand of the individual and on the other of the community which, at the beginning of it, he had inherited from the individualist thinkers of the eighteenth century and their disciples of the National Assembly and the Convention. Like the leaders of the Convention, he had struggled hard to shake free from the trammels of the past; and, like them, he bore the marks of the past upon him to the end. He had reached a far deeper and fuller conception of Right than any of his forerunners; he had welcomed, and gone far to define, the idea of progress; he had won more than a faint vision of the part played and to be played by nationality in the collective life of men. But all these things lay more or less apart from each other in his mind. They still awaited the touch of patient genius which should blend them into a consistent and living whole. His work was taken up, where he dropped it, by a man of wider grasp, of greater speculative power and of subtler intellect than his. How far the task, left unfinished by Fichte, was carried to a fair issue by Hegel—or how far Hegel too was overborne by its inherent difficulties—it is now our business to enquire.

#### [NOTE ON FICHTE'S RELATION TO ROUSSEAU]

In Vaughan's edition of the *Political Writings of Rousseau* (Epilogue to vol. ii.) there is an interesting discussion of Fichte's relations to Rousseau. It is somewhat coloured by reference to the responsibility of German philosophers for the outbreak of the Great War. But the following passage (pp. 525-6) is worth quoting:

"The State has a double duty: to its own citizens within; to other communities without. How, according to the two writers before us, is this twofold task to be fulfilled?

As to the former duty, both are agreed that self-sacrifice on the part of the citizens is the first thing needful for the health, and even the very existence, of the State. Neither of them—but Fichte far less than Rousseau—is alive enough to the necessity of providing practical safeguards against the tyranny of the State. Here, however, the resemblance between them ends. To Fichte, the citizen is a passive instrument in the hands of the State, or rather of the Government which usurps the name and functions of the State; and it is with the latter that rests the sole right of determining the purposes for which the instrument shall be used. To Rousseau, the

citizen is active, or he is nothing; and the State which should consist of obedient dummies would be no State at all. For this conviction, which lies at the core of his whole civic faith, there are two reasons to assign. The acceptance of it is, in his view, as necessary to the citizen as to the State. For the latter, it is the only security possible against the blindness of sovereign aristocracies and the inconceivable follies of monarchs. For the former, the passion of public service, widely spread and eagerly cherished, is, of all boons, the highest which the State has to offer. To those peoples, who have never had the courage or the wisdom to strive for it, the loss will seem as nothing; perhaps it will be taken for a gain. But it is just that which is their punishment; the judicial blindness which for ever denies to them 'the most heroic of all passions,' which for ever forbids them to 'know more happiness than this their present lot.'

As to the duty of the State towards its neighbours, the variance between the two writers is complete. To Fichte, the ideal of each State is limitless aggrandisement; and the chief means to that 'natural and necessary' end is war. The consequence, though he never puts it in so many words, is inevitable; there is no place left for international Right. Reverse this dismal doctrine, and we have the creed of Rousseau. Respect for the rights of others is the first duty of each State. A 'perpetual peace,' with guarantees for its permanent maintenance, is the ideal for which all should strive and which, but for the folly of their rulers, all might reach tomorrow. A policy of self-aggrandisement is as fatal to the conquering State as it is unjust and humiliating to the conquered. The only war to be tolerated is the war of defence against an invader from without, or from a tyrant within. A policy of offensive wars, in addition to its countless other evils, invariably carries with it, as it did to Rome of old, as it has done in recent times to each nation in turn that has adopted it, the scourge of despotism and oppression.

With each writer the one side of the theory necessarily follows from the other. With Rousseau we have an ideal of self-government and of corporate, if not individual, freedom within; of respect for the rights and freedom of others without. With Fichte, the sacrifice of the individual, to exalt the State whatever be the nature of the ends which it pursues, within; the sacrifice of all other nations, to enlarge its own territory and secure its own domination, without. The latter is the logical outcome of the doctrine of the 'absolute State.' It is the ideal—say rather the nightmare—of the drill-sergeant or dragoon. It is the flat negation of all freedom and all Right.

Such is the conflict between the ideals of Rousseau and of Fichte. It is not a conflict between the spirits of the two nations. For there was a time when the nobler minds of Germany took the creed of the French writer, the man to whom France was a second country, for their own. Among the torch-bearers of that higher and truer Germany was the greatest thinker Germany has brought forth. Kant, who died in the very year in which Fichte proclaimed his gloomy gospel, was proud to call himself the disciple of Rousseau. And Kant, no less than Rousseau, would have rejected the creed of Fichte with loathing and contempt."—*Ed.*]

## CHAPTER IV

### HEGEL

IN the preceding Chapters I have attempted to trace the history of the scattered protests raised against the abstract treatment of Political Philosophy, during the last three-quarters of the eighteenth century. The attack was delivered from two sides. By Kant and Fichte it was made in the name of Philosophy; by Montesquieu and Vico in the name of History. Each wing of the attacking force invoked, doubtless, to some extent, the aid of the other. Kant and Fichte appealed in some measure to History. Montesquieu and Vico were guided—the latter especially—by an instinct for Philosophy. But on the whole, the two lines of attack were pushed without concert; and the force of the assault was proportionately weakened. A man was needed who to the keen historical sense of Vico should join the philosophic genius of Kant and Fichte. And such a man was found in Hegel.

The contrast between Hegel and the greatest of his precursors was at least as marked as the resemblance. Like Kant, he based his system upon a spiritual idea; but in handling that idea he pursued a totally different method. Kant started from the individual consciousness; Hegel from the world of externalised knowledge and of organised institutions. Kant had striven to break thought into its elements; Hegel—and in this he followed, while he bettered, the example of Fichte—attempted to unfold it from its germs. Analysis, ‘criticism,’ is the dominant idea of Kant; the keynote to Hegel’s achievement is evolution.

The conception of evolution was already in the air. It had been applied to biological science by Oken and Goethe [as well as by some French and English writers]; it had been applied, though with less system, to the history of human thought and Art by Herder. But Hegel was the first writer to grasp the universal significance of what others had seized only in fragments. He was the first to interpret the whole range both of knowledge and action by the idea of development. And in no direction were the results more fruitful than in what concerned the less speculative

side of human energy; than in his works on Art, on History, on Political Philosophy. It was in the region of what, in a very special sense, he called 'spirit'—it was in interpreting the efforts of man to give outward expression to the spiritual instincts within him—that the genius of Hegel found fullest scope. It was here that his penetrative imagination and subtle sympathy enabled him to give freest play to the idea of evolution.

At this point, however, the student of recent thought needs to stand carefully on his guard. Since Hegel's time, the principle of evolution has been adopted largely both in natural and in mental science. But there could be no greater mistake than to confound Hegel's construction of it with that familiar to us from the writings of Darwin and his disciples. To them evolution is, in the first instance, a key to the mysteries of a world which lies outside of and apart from man; which human reason has no share in constituting; in relation to which, the only function of reason is to apprehend and to interpret it. In this sense, the part of evolution is to simplify the endless diversity of organic—and to some extent also of inorganic—nature; to trace the stages by which the higher forms of life, or being, have through countless ages been elaborated from the lower.

Evolution has, no doubt, also been applied to the facts of consciousness, as distinguished from an external world known to consciousness. But here too, as commonly understood, it is something very different from what it was to Hegel. It is either a principle which—assuming certain data, as fixed points—explains how the facts, as we know them, have historically been developed from those first beginnings; how, for instance—assuming sensation—our sensitive experience has gradually come to group itself into an ordered world of sensible objects. Or it is a principle which, attempting to get behind the data, as assumed above—attempting to resolve them into data still more elementary—is irresistibly led to regard mind as a development of matter, the organic as an outgrowth from the inorganic forms of being. The last word of evolution, so understood, on the ultimate problems of consciousness is thus either agnostic or frankly materialist. It pronounces the spiritual to be either unknowable; or, if knowable, to be a subtler form of the material.

In all these directions Hegel presents many points of contact with later, and more familiar, writers. Like them, he regards evolution as of vital importance in the interpretation of the world of nature. Like them, he traces the development of human thought from its first, which are to him its most abstract, beginnings to its latest outcome in a concrete system of ordered experience. Like them, he probes the instinctive assumptions of thought, in its



most primitive stages, and strives to pierce behind assumption to the intelligible principle that underlies it. On the first point he is as convinced as they; on the two others he is not less, but more, consistent. And it is just because he is more consistent that, both in conclusion and in spirit, his argument is so different from theirs.

An agnostic, however cautious—a materialist, however positive—cannot avoid introducing reason, the spiritual principle, at some stage, late or early, in the chain of argument and the process of development. The latter may indefinitely multiply the ‘moments’ through which matter has passed in giving birth to mind; but to mind he must needs come at last. The former may draw a sharp line between the material and the spiritual, between the known and the unknown. But, in the very act of drawing it, he has to admit that the unknown is present in every operation of knowledge, that the material is recognised, and can only be recognised, by the spiritual. Each therefore is involved in a contradiction of his own making. And from that contradiction he can only escape by a frank admission of the spiritual principle from the first.

And this is what Hegel does. In his view, the distinction between spirit and nature, between reason as knowing and the world as known, is not a final and absolute but a partial and relative distinction. They are the terms of a process, each of which is inseparable from, is necessary to the existence of, the other. Nature could not exist unless it were gathered into unity, and—so far as it is organic—quickened into life, by spirit. Reason cannot operate unless it throws itself outwards into a world of organised and related objects. Thus, in one sense, reason and matter, nature and spirit, are co-ordinate elements in the world of our experience. In another, and a fuller, sense reason is all in all. To escape from the circle of reason, even for a single instant, is impossible. Matter itself, the world that we call external, lies within that circle. It is the creation of reason. It exists only in and for reason—the divine reason, in the first instance; the human reason, so far as it reflects or partakes in the divine.

Indeed, if either of the two terms—matter and spirit—can fitly be described as the ‘unknown,’ it is matter. For matter, as such, is a pure abstraction, a term which only stands for the unqualified, and therefore the unknown. It signifies nothing more than the negation of spirit. It is known, only so far as it is qualified: and each successive qualification is the work of spirit or reason.

More than this. Each such qualification, each advance in knowledge, implies a fuller absorption of nature in spirit, a closer incorporation of reason with the world ‘outside’ it. For not only does reason, at each step, stamp itself more indelibly upon the world of nature; but, at the same time, it sees its own face more clearly

reflected from the world of nature. As the laws of each science are apprehended—as relations, before unsuspected, are discovered—analogies between the less adequate forms of being and the more adequate, between the lower types of organic—and even of inorganic—being, on the one hand, and the essential workings of reason itself, upon the other hand, are constantly brought to light. Advance in knowledge is, in fact, nothing more nor less than the perception of such analogies. It is the rediscovery of reason by herself in a world from which she had supposed herself to be banished. It is the continuous overthrow of barriers which, in the struggle to unfold her own energies, she had herself originally set up.

The rhythmic movement of thought from the abstract to the concrete, from the universal through the particular to the individual which includes and gives new meaning to both—the ‘dialectic’ which from a one-sided unity passes through diversity to a new unity that holds both elements in solution—this, the vital law of thought, is reproduced, though under a less adequate form, in the world ‘outside’ thought, in the world of nature. It appears, according to an ascending scale, in the world revealed to man by Physics, by Chemistry, by Biology. ‘Philosophy,’ to quote Hegel’s own words, ‘is not the only idealist. Nature also (at any rate in the form of Life) works out under the guise of fact what the Philosophy of the idea brings to full realisation in the region of spirit.’<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while insisting at every turn upon the idea of evolution, Hegel gives to that idea a wholly new significance. In his hands it ceases to be a mechanical, it becomes a spiritual, law. It is the evolution not of mind from matter, but of matter from mind. It is to be conceived not as a straight line, at one extremity of which stands nature, and reason at the other; but as a circular movement, which begins with the outgoing of spirit into nature, and ends with the return of nature into spirit. Its upshot is not to materialise reason, but to spiritualise nature.

But nature, though one of the forms taken by reason, is by no means the only, or the highest, form. However thoroughly the reason of man may penetrate nature, however completely it may come to spiritualise nature and to recognise its own work in nature, it is not in nature that reason, either human or divine, can ever

<sup>1</sup> ‘Denn nicht nur die Philosophie etwa ist idealistisch, sondern die Natur schon thut als Leben factisch dasselbe was die idealistische Philosophie in ihrem geistigem Felde vollbringt’ (*Ästhetik*, i. p. 153). Compare the following: ‘Das Interesse des Geistes ist nun dass die als äusserlich gesetzte Bestimmung als eine innerliche sei, dass natürliche und geistige Welt als innere, der Intelligenz angehörige, bestimmt werden, wodurch überhaupt die Einheit der Subjectivität und des Seyns, oder der *Idealismus des Daseyns*, gesetzt wird’ (*Phil. der Geschichte*, p. 170).

find its fullest and most adequate expression. The limitations which matter imposes upon reason can never, even when they are seen to be imposed in the last resort by reason itself, altogether cease to be limitations. As a mode of being, nature exhibits reason on a lower plane of energy—as an object of judgement, it calls for more rigid, and consequently less vital, categories—than can ever be adequate to the full measure of the stature of the free spirit. It is only in itself that the soul of man, to the full extent, can find itself. It is only in its direct working, only when unfettered by elements foreign to itself, only in the world which it creates out of and for itself, that reason, as a creative force, can be truly manifested; it is only in self-judgement that its highest powers, as a reflective principle, are called into play.

The distinction between the creative and the reflective powers of reason, obvious enough in itself, necessarily plays a considerable part in the system of Hegel. This is an inevitable result of the wide scope which he gives to the definition of reason. It corresponds to the ordinary distinction between experience and the active or artistic instincts of man on the one hand, and his speculative faculties upon the other. With this difference, however; that, while in ordinary life we are apt to regard the former merely as instincts—as faculties in which reason has no appreciable part—to Hegel they are as truly, though assuredly not in so high a sense, the work of reason as the latter. As a creative power, reason builds up the world of sensation, art, conduct and religion in which man habitually lives and moves. As a reflective power, it reconstructs in thought, and by a conscious effort of thought, the fabric which, blinded by the very force of its creative power, it has ceased to recognise as its own. It reviews with open eyes the ground which it had originally traversed blindfold, retracing the whole circle of its progress and marking how each step necessarily follows from those that had gone before.

Between these two faculties, the creative and the speculative, the various sciences may be said to mediate; breaking up the raw material furnished by instinct, distinguishing the various elements that compose it; and, by destroying their primitive unity, preparing the way for the higher, because more comprehensive and more clearly realised, unity of speculation. In the development of 'the idea'—that is, of the world conceived as the spontaneous development of thought—the sciences thus play a double part. On the one hand, they supply much, though by no means all, of the negative element which is necessary to the full life of reason and which, though one-sided in itself, prevents the natural intellect from becoming fossilised in a still more one-sided affirmation. In this capacity the function of the sciences is critical and destructive.

On the other hand, they contribute, beyond all possibility of calculation, to widening the range of man's experience; they do so even in the world of action, they do so yet more in that of thought. They also, as has been said, begin the work of lifting the immediate and intuitive perceptions of the natural man into the region of reflection, of perception mediated through reason; and thus furnish the starting-point of what, in the strictest sense of the term, is to be called speculation. And, so far, they have a constructive and creative force.

Thus, from the first step of every-day experience to the highest achievement of speculative philosophy—from the 'this' and 'that,' the 'now' and 'then,'<sup>1</sup> with which man's mental activity began to the fullest harmony of the results of all knowledge, that reflection has hitherto framed—the evolution of the idea has gone on unbroken. In each of the special sciences that evolution is merely partial; in none of them is it fully intelligible until it is realised as being but a part, and is taken in its due relation to the other parts, of the whole. For all the special sciences start with assumptions; the justification of which is found, and can only be found, in the movement of the whole. Hence neither the special sciences nor Philosophy, which is the harmony of all sciences, can be understood so long as they are regarded as furnishing nothing better than results, more or less compendious. It is not the last stage, but the whole process of evolution that in truth is of vital moment.<sup>2</sup> It is the movement—not the fixed points at which, for convenience sake, we arbitrarily arrest the movement—that constitutes the essence of the idea. The soul, as Hegel constantly insists, is not a substance, but a subject; not something that can be detached and laid bare and probed by the scalpel of reflection, but a living organism whose life consists in the consciousness of its own activity. The idea is not an object but a vital process of growth, 'whose seed is in itself.'

It is for this reason that it has seemed necessary to dwell at some length on the more general aspects of Hegel's teaching. For no part of his system can either be estimated at its proper worth or even disclose its full meaning, unless it be studied with some reference to the whole. Hence all his works, with the exception of those which have for their subject the central problem of philosophy, begin with indicating the place of the special theme proposed—whether Art, Religion or History—in the total development of the idea.

<sup>1</sup> *Phänomenologie*, pp. 71-82.

<sup>2</sup> 'Denn die Sache ist nicht in ihrem Zwecke erschöpft, sondern in ihrer Ausführung, noch ist das Resultat das wirkliche Ganze, sondern es zusammen mit seinem Werden' (*Phänomenologie*, p. 5).

The works of Hegel, bearing directly or indirectly on the special theme of Political Philosophy, are the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, the first—and in many respects the greatest—of his mature writings, published in 1807; it is said to have been completed on the day of the battle of Jena in the October of the preceding year; the *Philosophie des Rechts*, published in 1820; and the *Philosophie der Geschichte*, the substance of Lectures delivered to the students of Berlin at intervals during the years from 1822 to 1831. They thus cover the whole period between the somewhat late majority of Hegel, as a thinker, and his untimely death, in November 1831. Following the great upheaval of the French Revolution, and contemporary with the struggle for nationality and the reaction against abstract ideas of Right that succeeded it, they reflect—probably with more fidelity than the works of any other writer—the conflicting tendencies of the time to which they belong. And they do so, because they represent not only the conflict but the hidden harmony that lay behind it. Other writers, as we have seen, embody antagonistic phases of this stirring period; but they do so, for the most part, unconsciously and with results disastrous to their consistency. Hegel is the one man who attempts to give each of the warring opposites its due place in the development of the idea of Right, and to reconcile them by insisting that each enters as no more than one element, interacting perpetually with other elements, in the complete result. That he succeeds in holding an even balance between their conflicting claims—in particular, that he succeeds in doing absolute justice as between the progressive and the conservative, the ideal and the historical, elements of Right would be too much to assert. He lived too far in the thick of the struggle to rise at all times above its passions. But at least he makes a sincere effort to do so; and, if he fails, it is perhaps rather in the application of his principles to the passing needs and circumstances of his own day than in the development of them under the ‘dry light’ of the idea.

And, if the strange conflict of tendencies which marked his lifetime made impartiality a specially hard task for Hegel, it certainly was not without its corresponding gain. At no time was the interaction of the forces that constitute the political life of men so forced upon the notice of the student, at no time was it so natural to conceive of the idea as the resultant of that interaction—to conceive of it not as one-sided and unchangeable, but as manifold and progressive—as in the period marked successively by the Convention, the Empire, the war of Liberation, the Holy Alliance and the Revolutions of 1830. This was the opportunity of Hegel; and he used it to apply the conception of development—of the ‘dialectic’ movement of thought—which we have traced in its

more speculative bearings, to the problems of Political Philosophy and to the interpretation of History.

The method, pursued by Hegel in political enquiry, is determined by the two central ideas of his whole system. These are, firstly that there is nothing in the whole world of man's experience which is not the creation of reason; and secondly, that reason being essentially a principle of growth, no one of its manifestations is intelligible, unless it be studied along the lines of its continuous development. By the latter Hegel binds himself to the historical method. By the former he asserts that, through all the fluctuations of History, it is no result of chance, but a rational principle—the idea of freedom, as embodied in the State—that is working itself out. Thus two strands of thought, which with most writers tend to fall apart, in Hegel are harmoniously combined. His method is historical; but he never forgets that the development which he sets himself to trace is the development not of events nor of institutions, but of the speculative idea. His subject is speculative; but in his view the idea, like all other things, has a history; and it is only by following its history, its growth in time, that its true nature can be understood. In a fuller sense than that in which the words were originally employed by Vico, Hegel may be said to have traced 'the ideal and eternal laws of that History'—the history of the efforts made by the will of man to establish its outward and collective, as opposed to its inward and individual freedom—'which runs its course in time.' For in Vico the ideal element seldom stands in more than an external and mechanical relation to the historical. In theory they are united; in practice he can hardly be said to rise—save at rare moments—beyond the sphere of historical accident, or to lift the seemingly arbitrary succession of events, as in time, into the region of the 'eternal and the ideal.' In Hegel, on the contrary, the two are inseparably blended. His theme is the idea; but it is the idea conceived as a concrete whole, unfolding itself gradually and continuously from its simplest germ—from the Rights of the 'person' before the Roman Law, or (in another point of view) from the patriarchal stagnation of China—to its richest and most complex embodiment in the civilisation of modern Christendom.

It follows from this that Hegel's conception of progress is at once more definite and more complete than that offered by Vico, or indeed by any of his predecessors. More definite, because it forms an essential link in a theory which embraces the whole circle of human thought and which, whatever else may be its defects, is certainly not wanting in philosophical precision. More complete, because—so far from remaining a purely formal and abstract conception—it is worked out in elaborate detail, and pre-

sented as shaping the successive types through which the collective life of man has passed—those types which, far more truly than the ‘great men’ of whom Burke spoke, are ‘the landmarks of human history.’

It is clear that such a conception can only be adequately grasped when the student has mastered at least the outlines of the Philosophy of Right and of History, as expounded by Hegel. But, without attempting a sketch of his work in these subjects—which could not fail to be unsatisfactory—it will be well to consider a few general questions which suggest themselves at every turn of his argument, and which are more or less fully discussed in one or other of the books mentioned above. And first, what is the relation of the idea to its historical embodiment? How can we adjust the claims of the speculative and the historical elements in the development of Right? In what manner are we to conceive of the transition from one form of Right—from one type of political organisation—to another? A complete answer to these questions could only be found by a careful study of Hegel’s writings, and in particular of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. But it may be possible to indicate briefly the lines followed by Hegel in his solution of them.

Apart from its historical embodiment—or rather, from the logical form remaining when each successive embodiment is stripped of casual and unessential accretions—the idea has no existence. That logical form *is* the speculative element in the successive shapes which Right, as the more abstract, or the political ideal, as the more concrete conception, has assumed in the course of man’s historical development. To conceive of the idea as something separate or separable from the minds of the men who gave it birth, or the institutions in which they embodied it, betrays a misunderstanding of the whole nature of human thought. Each successive stage of political life, recorded by History, is, for the age that created it, the idea of justice, so far as that age was capable of grasping it. But as soon as the idea, so limited, has worked itself out to its logical consequences, the limitation—the one-sidedness—inherent in it, becomes apparent; the contradiction, involved in all limited conceptions, forces itself into notice; and a new form of political activity, a new embodiment of the idea, comes into being. The new form thus presents itself as the negation of that which had gone before. But such a negation is no blank denial. The very fact that it is the negation of what is positive and determined gives to it also a positive and determinate character. And the more complete the negation, the more full—the more definite—also is the affirmation. The second form is not a mere cancelling of the first, but a correction of it. The elements which composed the earlier form

are not destroyed; they are fused in the wider and more vital combination of the new.

Thus, at each stage of its development, the idea contains both a positive and a negative element; or rather, is itself both positive and negative. Negative, when regarded exclusively in relation to the stage that has gone before; positive, when taken by itself or in relation to the whole. Even those periods of History which we are apt to dismiss as marked by the purely critical and destructive spirit, when viewed as parts of the whole movement, are seen to be positive and creative. They are necessary as moments in the history of human progress. Necessary, not merely *de facto* but *de jure*; not merely because they are found to have existed in fact; nor even because, had they been modified, all subsequent periods must have been modified in proportion; but because, in looking backwards, we can see that they were demanded by the logic of ideas—that, given the ebb and flow of human thought, a movement in one direction is inevitably followed by a corresponding movement in another. Such periods, no less than those on which we commonly dwell with greater pleasure, are essential stages ‘on the road pursued by the reason of the natural man as it presses onwards towards the truth’; they are necessary moments ‘in the pilgrimage of the soul as it passes through the long series of forms imposed on it—of resting-places prescribed to it—by the laws of its own being; as it strives to purge itself to the life of the Spirit and, by the discipline of self-experience, to attain to the knowledge of its true nature.’<sup>1</sup>

From the closing words, and the brief sketch preceding them, it can be seen what is Hegel’s answer to the question with which we started. In his view, the speculative element is inseparable from the element of fact, the idea not to be disentangled from its historical embodiment. With this reservation, however, that, while the idea is only to be reached through the facts, it is the idea—and not the facts—which is the real object of our study. If it be true that the idea is unattainable without the facts, it is equally true that the facts are unintelligible without the idea. The idea is not to be regarded as an after-thought, a standard arbitrarily imposed on the facts from without; but as the vital principle of which each successive stage of progress is the outgrowth, as the life and soul of the facts of History and Right.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Diese Darstellung . . . kann als der Weg des natürlichen Bewusstseyns, das zum wahren Wissen dringt, genommen werden; oder als der Weg der Seele, welche die Reihe ihrer Gestaltungen, als durch ihre Natur ihr vorgesteckter Stationen, durchwandert, dass sie sich zum Geiste läutere, indem sie durch die vollständige Erfahrung ihrer selbst zur Kenntniss desjenigen gelangt, was sie an sich selbst ist’ (*Phänomenologie*, p. 61).



And this brings us to the other question with which, at this point, we are concerned. What is the exact nature of progress, and in what sense is it to be regarded as continuous? Progress is understood by Hegel not loosely, as an equivalent term for change; but in the strict sense of change according to a fixed principle, and for the better.<sup>1</sup> 'Development is no merely formal process—development of nothing in particular. It is the gradual working towards a determinate end. That end is the realisation of the Spirit; and, more precisely, of the Spirit according to its essential principle, the principle of freedom.' 'Freedom, and freedom alone, is the truth of the life of the Spirit.'

In the more primitive forms of political life—in the Eastern world and in the States of Greece and Rome—the realisation of freedom is unconscious, and therefore rudimentary, or conscious only in a partial or limited sense. In India and China it exists only for the ruler; in Greece and Rome the freedom of the few was purchased by the slavery of the many. It was Christianity that first consciously conceived freedom as an idea—as the ideal to be realised by all men. But even then the work of progress was little more than begun. The early Christians were content with freedom in its most abstract form—the freedom of the spirit in inward communion with God. The application of the idea to the outward life of man, to his social and political requirements, can hardly be said to have begun before the formation of the German States upon the ruins of the Roman Empire; and it is by no means completed at the present day.

Progress, then, is the gradual realisation of the idea of freedom. And by freedom is meant not the mere absence of external restraints; not the liberty of the individual to do what he will with his own faculties and his own possessions—though, within certain limits, these are essential conditions of the true freedom; but the untrammelled development of man's powers—moral, intellectual and spiritual—according to the fundamental laws of his own nature. What those laws are, is only made fully apparent in the long course of their development. This is a necessary consequence of the fact that they are the laws of man's own nature, that they are not imposed upon him, ready made, from without. But man has acted upon them by instinct long before he has consciously conceived of

<sup>1</sup> 'Die Entwicklung . . . ist nicht das bloss Formelle des sich Entwickelns überhaupt, sondern das Hervorbringen eines Zwecks von bestimmtem Inhalte. Diesen Zweck haben wir von Anfang an festgestellt, es ist der Geist, und zwar nach seinem Wesen, dem Begriff der Freiheit' (*Phil. der Geschichte*, p. 69). 'Es ist diese eine Erkenntniss der speculativen Philosophie, dass die Freiheit das einzige Wahrhafte des Geistes sei' (*ib.* p. 22).

them, as an idea. If it were not so, Philosophy—or rather, the imperfect insight of individual philosophers—would be the true creator of human nature; an absurdity which, though deliberately avowed by none, is in fact the implied assumption of not a few who call themselves philosophers; and who, so far as this can truly be said of them, incur the charge—the most damaging that can be brought against a philosopher—of ‘trampling the roots of humanity under foot.’<sup>1</sup>

It is, then, to the instincts of man—to his instincts, as embodying his ‘permanent reason’—and not to the authority of any philosopher, however eminent, that appeal must be made in determining what are the fundamental laws of human nature. And it is only through History—through the history of the various institutions in which the moral experience of man is ‘written large’—that those laws can be known. Hence the historical cast of Hegel’s whole theory; and of no part of it more markedly than that which deals with Moral and Political Philosophy. It is through History that we trace not only the progress, but the very nature of man’s moral being. Whatever, under the endless fluctuations of History, appears as a constant element—constant in its essence, though varying in its outward form—that is a law of human nature; or rather, that is the abstract germ, of which the law, as unfolded through the progressive stages of man’s experience, is the concrete expression.

Progress—progress in freedom, understood as the realisation of man’s higher nature—is thus the key both to History in general and to Political Philosophy, or the idea of Right, in particular. But is that progress continuous? In Hegel’s view it is and it is not. If by continuity of progress it be meant that all communities have either in fact progressed, or are capable of doing so—or if again it be meant that capacity for progress, once shown by any nation, remains the property of that nation to all eternity—then it can be conclusively proved that progress is not continuous. A reference to China or the Fiji Islands on the one hand, a comparison of modern with ancient Greece on the other hand, is sufficient to dispel the illusion at a glance.

But this, after all, is not the only, nor perhaps the highest, way of understanding continuity. It is not the way in which we under-

<sup>1</sup> ‘Indem jener sich auf das Gefühl, sein inwendiges Orakel, beruft, ist er gegen den, der nicht übereinstimmt, fertig; er muss erklären, dass er dem weiter nichts zu sagen habe, der nicht dasselbe in sich finde und fühle; mit anderen Worten, er tritt die Wurzel der Humanität mit Füßen’ (*Phänomenologie*, p. 53). These words, and a great part of the Preface from which they are taken, are commonly understood to have been aimed at Schelling.

stand it, for instance, when we speak of evolution as applied to animal life. There we do not demand that all the members of a given species should be capable of development into a new and a higher species. On the contrary, we are aware that such a thing is beyond all bounds of possibility. We even surmise that the incapacity of the many is a condition essential to the higher development of the favoured few; that without the spur of competition, the struggle for existence, the latter would lack the outward inducement which eventually leads to the evolution of a new type. We are eager to admit that certain species, themselves developed from a lower form of life—themselves, that is, a witness to the working of progress—have become extinct; and that, without giving birth to a further species, to a higher form of life. None of these facts prevents us from speaking of the ‘continuity’ of evolution, as between the most primitive and the most highly organised form of animal being; and it would be absurd that it should.

Now, if we allow ourselves this latitude—if latitude it be—when we pronounce upon the continuity of progress in the comparatively simple matter of animal life, with much stronger reason may we claim to do so when our subject is the infinitely more complicated evolution of human institutions and human thought. Here progress is not under the physical limitations which, just because they are limitations, so greatly simplify the study of biological science. In animal life evolution, if it is to be at all, must from the nature of the case be from parent to child, from ancestor to descendant. In the development of thought there is no such restriction. Here vigour and insight may pass from one nation to another—just as, on the smaller scale of individual life, ability and energy may and do pass from one family to another—unshackled by any binding laws of heredity or physical descent. The unit, in all questions of progress, is not the nation but the whole of mankind. And, though it requires very special circumstances to bring an entirely new race within the circle of human progress, such circumstances have been known to arise in the past and may, so far as we can tell, arise again at any moment in the future. For, in these matters, account has to be taken not merely of so exceptional a train of events as that which led to the conversion of the German tribes; but of a religious awakening, independent to all appearance of external circumstances, such as that which, for a time, placed the Arabs within the pale, if not at the head, of medieval civilisation.

From these considerations it is clear that, in dealing with the progress of human thought, a wider meaning must be given to ‘continuity’ than that which holds good in biological science. It is not continuity of descent, but continuity of operation that is here

demanded. The discrepancy, however, is not so great as might at first appear. The channel of communication may be different; but the result is much the same. And it is with the result, not with the manner in which it is brought about, that we are alone concerned.

There is, however, one further point which it is necessary to define in the sense of continuity, as applied to the progress of human thought and political life. Continuity, if it is to accord with the facts, must not be taken to exclude either periods of apparent stagnation, or periods during which the gain in one direction is balanced—and perhaps, for the time, more than balanced—by loss in another. As an instance of the first sort, we may perhaps take—though a reservation would have to be made in favour of the Renaissance—the history of the Fifteenth Century after Christ; as an instance of the second, the long period covered by the barbarian invasions. Here, however, it is right to remember that the fuller our knowledge of such periods, the more able we are to trace the workings of new life amid apparent decay, and the less ready to be discouraged by the loss which, at a cursory glance, is apt to throw into the shade the indisputable gain. And it may be that, dazzled by his fervid enthusiasm for the classical world and especially the world of Greek thought and Greek art, Hegel was himself blinded to the signs of a brighter dawn behind the darkest night that has ever fallen on mankind—the destruction of the Roman Empire and of classical civilisation. So at least one would infer from an eloquent passage to be found in the Introduction to the *Philosophie der Geschichte*.<sup>1</sup> But, whatever may have been Hegel's personal bias on this matter, there is no doubt that such periods of arrested growth have been in the history of human progress, and may be again. It is equally clear that similar periods are found in the history of the development of the natural organism.<sup>2</sup> And if in the latter case we do not, on that account, abandon our belief in the continuity of progress, there can be no reason why we should do so in the former.

The general result is that—with the one important difference,

<sup>1</sup> 'Es giebt in der Weltgeschichte mehrere grosse Perioden, die vorübergegangen sind, ohne dass die Entwicklung sich fortgesetzt zu haben scheint, in welchen vielmehr der ganze ungeheure Gewinn der Bildung vernichtet worden, und nach welchen unglücklicher Weise wieder von vorne angefangen werden musste, um mit einiger Beihülfe etwa von geretteten Trümmern jener Schätze mit erneuertem unermesslichen Aufwand von Kräften und Zeit, von Verbrechen und von Leiden, wieder eine der längst gewonnenen Regionen jener Bildung zu erreichen' (*Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 69).

<sup>2</sup> See Darwin, *Origin of Species*, chap. xi., especially pp. 291, 300, 307.

noticed above<sup>1</sup>—the analogy between the evolution of animal life and that of human thought is singularly close. In each case there are various types—species on the one hand, states or nations on the other—that seem to have played no part in the progressive movement of the whole. In each case there have been periods of rapid growth, alternating (even in the more fruitful types) with periods of growth so slow as to be almost imperceptible. In each case every step in advance can be shown to follow on a rational principle—in the former by the ‘logic of events,’ in the latter by the yet more rigorous logic of ideas—from those which have gone before.

The last point is, in fact, the kernel of the whole question. It offers the only sense in which it would be worth while either to affirm or to deny the continuity of progress. That the torch of progress should pass from the hands of one nation to those of another, that the speed of the race should vary from age to age—this is a small matter, and one that the impatience of man may well leave to the seeming accidents of time. But that there is such a thing as progress—progress on a rational principle and towards a determined goal—that is a point which touches man in his deepest interests; a belief, without which human action would be the sport of chance, and human history no better than an unintelligible riddle.

This, then, is the absolute and vital sense of the continuity of progress. It is the gradual advance from a more to a less imperfect realisation of moral and intellectual truth; and that, not on the part of any given community, but of mankind as a whole. Doubtless, even apart from progress in the absolute sense, there may be progress of a more limited kind and in a more restricted acceptance. There are communities which have never added anything to the general stock of human knowledge or moral insight; and they may yet have had either enough energy in themselves to follow the course previously traversed by other nations, or enough docility to accept at a gift a civilisation which it would have been entirely beyond their powers to originate. In this limited and partial sense, many nations may be called progressive which yet can claim no place as ‘historical peoples,’<sup>2</sup> no part in the Philosophy of History as understood by Hegel. It may even be that there is no race so ill equipped that, had circumstances favoured, it might not have shown capacity for progress, in this relative and restricted shape.

These, however, are questions to be determined purely on historical grounds; and they are questions of altogether minor importance, when compared with the question: Does mankind as a whole, and as represented by its leading races, advance in

<sup>1</sup> Page 155.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Welthistorische, weltgeschichtliche Völker’ (*Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp. 86, 93, 99).

knowledge of moral and intellectual truth, or does it not? It is on this point that Hegel concentrates all his energies. It is round this point, as he rightly discerned, that the battle must be fought. To him, History is the pilgrimage of the spirit of man in search of itself. One nation after another has taken up the quest; one nation after another has wearied in it. But at each stage man has come nearer to the appointed goal. With each advance he has won a clearer knowledge of his own powers, and achieved a fuller realisation of the idea 'whose pattern is laid up in the heavens':

Et, quasi cursores, vitai lampada tradunt.

It remains to ask, what is the ground of this belief in the mind of Hegel himself? On what proof does he base the sovereignty of reason in the history of man? Does he appeal to experience, or to reason, or to faith? It is probable that with most men the belief in the reasonableness of History, so far as it exists at all, is based either on the first or on the last of these three alternatives. It is either purely empirical, or purely matter of faith. In the latter case it is bound up with a trust in Providence that may or may not be able to justify itself by reason. In the former, it is generally found to be compatible with a suspicion that the progress of the world so far is a creditable accident, and that it may at any time give place to immobility or decay. It would be hard to account for this prevailing readiness to question the stability of historical progress; it would be hard to say why this particular induction—for an induction it is, *ex hypothesi*; and, what is more, an induction that can hardly be said to have been questioned seriously—should be held to stand on lower ground than any other induction. But the fact must be accepted. It is matter of common experience that those who admit progress in regard to the past are not seldom sceptical about its continuance in the future.

With Hegel it is different. In asserting the reasonableness of History, he appeals both to experience and to philosophical necessity. In his view, the proof depends both on empirical grounds and on the essential nature of the world as known to, and constructed by, reason. And it is on the latter ground that he inevitably and rightly lays the greatest stress. To him the work of reason in moulding History is but one manifestation, co-ordinate with others, of its creative power in general. It is not only in nature but also, and indeed more fully, in the collective destiny of man that the plastic force of reason is displayed. There is no need to retrace here the process by which Hegel arrived at the belief that the whole world of experience is the creation of reason. A sketch of it has been given at the beginning of the present chapter. And to that sketch, by way of application to the special case of History, it is

enough to add the following passage from the Introduction to the *Philosophie der Geschichte*.

‘It is to speculative Philosophy that we must turn for the proof that Reason—we may abide here by this term, without enquiring more closely into its precise relation to God—that Reason forms both the Substance of all natural and spiritual life, and the infinite Power which controls that Substance; that Reason is, in itself, the inexhaustible matter of all such life, as well as the infinite Form which gives actuality and energy to this its content. Reason is the Substance of all life; for it is that whereby and wherein all things actual are and have their being. It is the infinite Power controlling the Substance; for Reason is not so powerless as to remain in the region of the Ideal and the Should-be—as to display itself only apart from the actual world, who knows where—or to exist merely as some peculiar entity in the heads of certain individuals. Again, Reason is the inexhaustible Content, the essence and the truth, of all experience. It is its own Matter, and it is by its own activity that it works that matter into shape. For Reason is no finite power; it has no need to be conditioned by a material outside itself; it has no call on a given stuff, whose function it should be to supply food and objects to its activity. Reason draws its sustenance from itself; it is itself the matter which it works into shape. Reason presupposes nothing but itself; it is its own absolute end. It is Reason which from its own inmost sanctuary brings into outward and actual experience not only the universe of Nature, but the universe of Spirit—in the History of the world. That the Idea, so understood, is the true, the eternal, the absolute power controlling life—that it reveals itself in the world, and that there is nothing revealed in the world but the Idea, the glory and majesty of the Idea—all this, as has been said, is proved in Philosophy, and throughout this enquiry is assumed as there proved.’<sup>1</sup>

From the above passage it is clear on what grounds, and in what sense, Hegel asserts the sovereignty of reason in the field of History. The action of reason—in History, as in other regions of experience—is no mechanical operation from without. It is a vital process of formation from within. If the result is in accordance with reason, it is because the whole work, from beginning to end, is the creation of reason. And if it be objected that this is no guarantee, and that the counsels of reason may themselves at any moment be turned into foolishness, we may reply that this is an argument which cuts deeper than is intended by those who use it. It is as valid against the work of reason in the world of nature or in mathematical science as against its work in Morals, in Politics or in History. The whole fabric of reason

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 13.

must stand or fall together. It is impossible to accept the results, the creative energy, of reason in the sphere of nature, and with the same breath to reject them in the sphere of spirit. Scepticism must take all or nothing. If it takes all, it is doubtless self-destructive. But if it makes shift with half measures, it is illogical.

Thus, on the one hand, Hegel defends his ground against those who deny the reasonableness of History. On the other hand, and with no less force, he meets those who misconstrue and pervert it. To say that the course of History is governed by reason is, doubtless, to say that it is governed by Providence. But the belief in Providence, as generally understood, is a purely abstract conception. It is, moreover, apt to take the form of belief in special interventions; and that is a doctrine which cuts up reason by the very roots. If the belief that God rules the world of human action is to be a vital belief—more than that, if it is to be one that can stand against honest criticism—it must not only reject everything that is above or beyond nature, but also—and the second step follows logically from the first—indicate the process by which the idea of God gives itself concrete shape in the development of human society and institutions. The reason of God must be shown to act through the reason of man—as it must be shown to act through the phenomena of nature—or there is no room left for it in the world of human experience. It must abide in the movement of History, or be cast out of History altogether.

It is because he resolutely refuses to rest content with the mere abstract assertion of Providence, because he insists on tracing the development of the 'divine idea' step by step from the less to the more adequate realisation of it in human history, that Hegel's work in this matter is so significant. It is for this reason that he has left so deep a mark on the current conception both of History and of Political Philosophy. In Political Philosophy his influence has been hardly less strong upon opponents such as Comte and Spencer than on disciples like Mazzini. And as for his influence on historical study, its extent can best be measured by comparing the work of Michelet or of Ranke with that of their most illustrious predecessor, Gibbon. The latter writer, with all his greatness, hardly attempts to get behind the framework and the scaffolding of History. The two former are at least as much historians of ideas as of events; and on both, though doubtless in different degrees, the influence of Hegel is unmistakable.

There is, however, one misconception against which it is well to guard. It is sometimes objected that Hegel's method leaves no room for the free play of individual will and character in History. There are two sides from which this objection is



commonly urged, on the part of the historian and on that of the moralist. The historian claims, and claims justly, that the details of his subject are largely matters of accident, the result of individual caprice; and, so far, cannot fairly be brought under general laws nor regarded as the work of divine reason, as a manifestation of the idea. The moralist, with perhaps less justice, pleads that to reduce human action to general laws is to impose restraints on the freedom of the will, and to strike a blow at individual and national responsibility. But whatever force these objections may have against some forms of the doctrine that History is rational,<sup>1</sup> they can hardly be urged with effect against the theory or the practice of Hegel.

Nothing, in fact, could be clearer than Hegel's position in this matter. It is not with the details, but with the general results, of History that he professes to deal. It is these, and these alone, that he claims to bring under reasonable laws or to treat as moments in the gradual development of the idea. Such general results he does, doubtless, regard as necessary—that is, as determined by the essential laws of reason, human and divine. And no man who is not prepared to identify reason with blind chance, can deny that they are so. But the fact that the result is necessary in no way implies that all the incidents which precede, nor even all those which seem to lead to, the result are necessary also. The goal may be fixed; but the means of reaching it, especially in a world liberal of time, may for all practical purposes be infinite. The historian has no just cause of quarrel with Hegel for adulteration of historical detail.

Nor can the complaint of the moralist be said to rest upon more tenable ground. For not only does Hegel, as has been shown, exclude the whole sphere of detail from the scope of ideal History, but he even goes out of his way to make large—in some respects, it may be, exaggerated—allowance for the freedom of individual action. The forces which go to the making of History—the forces through which the idea works its way to actuality—are, he insists, no abstractions. They are forces that enlist in their service the interests and passions of men, good and bad, wise and foolish, just and unjust. The idea, if it is to become anything more than an idea, must take upon itself the flesh and blood of

<sup>1</sup> Ferrari's *Storia delle rivoluzioni d' Italia*, for instance—brilliant as it is—may perhaps fairly be charged both with a tendency to force events, which is perilous to the historian, and with a fatalism which pays scant regard to the claims of human freedom and of justice. The following passage from the Preface is typical: 'La fatalità: ecco il principio che regna sui pensieri degli uomini e sulle cose di questo mondo, la Dea di tutte le rivoluzioni repubblicane o dinastiche,' etc. (i. p. 17).

human nature. It must come down from the untroubled region of abstract thought—which, just because it is abstract, is one-sided and undeveloped and incomplete—to the world of mortal passion and the dust and heat of conflict. In that conflict the ends for which men fight are always finite, and commonly selfish, ends. In battling for such ends, the last thing that the combatants on either side have in view is to advance or to retard the cause of the idea, in and for itself. It is their own interests that they are busy to serve; their own ambitions, their own passions, that they are concerned to satisfy. Yet, none the less, in serving their own cause they are, unknown to themselves, taking sides for or against what is also the cause of progress. And as figures in the world's history, it is by what they have done, or not done, in that cause that they must stand or fall. As individuals they may appeal to other standards; and the moralist may see reason to reverse the judgement of the historian. But the heroes of history are those whose life has fallen at a turning-point in the affairs of men and who, at whatever cost to hallowed traditions, have boldly cut the moorings which bound them to the old order and resolutely cast themselves upon the tide that set towards the new. Their motives may have been pure or impure; their character just or unjust. They may have been like Napoleon, or they may have been like Luther. In any case the choice was their own. They acted with perfect freedom. So far as they served the cause of reason, it was in virtue of having made it their own cause, and identified it with their own aims, their own passions, possibly their own selfish ambitions. Conversely, so far as they won success for their own aims, it was in virtue of having, consciously or unconsciously, made them one with the cause of reason, with the given 'moment' in the development of the idea.<sup>1</sup>

If this account of the part played by the individual will in relation to progress errs at all, it is in the stress laid upon the independence, the self-sufficiency, if not the selfishness, of the individual. This, however—and a reference to the passage concerned will show that it has been considerably softened in the above account—only serves to clear Hegel the more completely from the charge of effacing the play of individual character and will from the general movement of historical progress. The philosophy of Hegel is popularly supposed to live and move in abstractions. But, in fact, no thinker is more resolute in his hatred of abstractions and his determination to track the idea home to the most concrete of its embodiments. The present is a notable instance. In his anxiety to embrace all the contradictions in which the life of the idea as a 'dialectic' process consists, Hegel is here led to exaggerate

<sup>1</sup> See *Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp. 25-41.

a contradiction which may certainly present itself in particular cases, but which, as certainly, is no necessary nor constant element in our experience of history.<sup>1</sup> What is in reality a case more or less exceptional is raised by him to the rank of a universal law. That the individual must make the idea his own, that it must become to him a personal interest, is very true. But that he must make it his own in a bad sense, that his interest in it must of necessity be a selfish interest—for this assertion we have no warrant in the facts of history. The example of the great statesmen may possibly confirm it; but that of the religious reformers is assuredly against it. This, however, is beside the present question. What here concerns us is that the very error of Hegel, if it be an error, is in itself a confutation of the objection brought by the moralist against his conception of History. The more he exalts the passion of the individual as against the untroubled march of the idea, the less is he open to the charge of undermining the freedom of the will or of casting the individual under an iron law of fate.

Indeed, it is of the essence of Hegel's doctrine that the opposition between the individual and the general order—whether as the State, or as the wider whole whose action is reflected in universal history—entirely loses its meaning. His *Rechtsphilosophie* marks the final and conscious breach with the individualist theory which, under one shape or another, had dominated Europe since the time of the Reformation. And it does so, not because it falls back upon the evil way of sacrificing the individual to the community, but because it recognises in the community the only possible ground for the free development of the individual; and not only for his free development, but for his very existence as a moral being; the life and source of his conduct, character and ideals.

In drawing out this conception, it is significant that Hegel deliberately abandons the purely historical method of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* and the *Philosophie der Geschichte*. His object is, not to give the natural history of political thought and endeavour, but to trace the logical development of the idea of Right. The conclusion of the *Rechtsphilosophie* is naturally the same with that of the two other works; but it is reached in a different manner. Like them, its gist is to prove that all abstractions, whether those current in common life or such as are due to the speculation of successive theorists, are necessarily self-destructive; and that, however much they may enter as elements, they can never enter as more than elements into that actual experience which alone is the ultimate test of truth—the canon, as well as the raw material, of all valid and fruitful speculation. But its method of proof is more rigorous, because its matter is more free from historical

<sup>1</sup> This is admitted in *Rechtsphil.*, p. 163.

chance, than theirs. Its task is, not to give the theory of a process which has worked itself out under given conditions of time, place and circumstance, but to show that, even when stripped of all accidents, the result is still substantially the same.

Historical, in the wider sense of the term, the method of Hegel never ceases to be. And even in the *Rechtsphilosophie*, with some notable exceptions, he follows the main order of historical development. But this is rather because the logical order is, in the main, also the natural order, than because he holds himself bound by the strict succession of events. It is the logical development of the idea of Right that he sets himself to trace; the gradual progress from its most abstract and imperfect to its most concrete and comprehensive shape; its expansion from the narrowest germ to the widest and fullest growth that it has yet attained. And in doing this he is more than once led to forestall, and to forestall in a manner that may cause considerable confusion to the unwary, the actual order of political thought, as it has 'run its course in time.'

At the very threshold we are met by a startling departure from the historical order of ideas. The form of Right with which Hegel starts—and necessarily, because it is the most abstract form imaginable—is Right in its juridical acceptation; the right of each individual as against all others before the Law. In this stage of Right, abstraction is made of all that marks off one man from any other. Rank, talent, character, motive—all alike are thrust aside. Each individual stands as a 'person,' and none as more than a person—in virtue of his personality he is conscious of himself as equal, yet not as more than equal, to any other individual—before the bar of legal Right. Balder than this no conception of the will, as a conscious process, could possibly be. It is the will of man reduced to its lowest terms, and stripped of every quality save that without which it would cease, in any strict sense, to be the will; of everything, that is, except the power of presenting itself to itself as an object of thought and a subject capable of resolution. Earlier stages than this, man, as an active being, has undoubtedly passed through. But they are stages in which the distinct consciousness of self is wanting to him; in which he has acted purely by habit or by instinct; and in which, therefore, the idea of Right, because the idea of will, cannot yet be said to have been formed. It is in the conception of Right that the will of man first comes into conscious possession of itself. But, just because it is the first, this conception is also the most abstract.

The abstract character of the will, in this stage of consciousness, demands an equally abstract character in its object. Accordingly, the matter with which Right is concerned is a matter purely external to the 'person'; a matter in which his finding of himself

is of the most fleeting and rudimentary kind. It is property which may be his one moment and pass to a stranger or an enemy the next; and which, even while it remains with him, is a merely outward and accidental expression of his will. It is true that property, as we know it in civilised communities, is commonly qualified by the consent of two contracting parties; it has only passed to one man by formal bequest or purchase from another. And this, the stage of contract, undoubtedly represents an advance upon the purely arbitrary character, the mere assertion of individual caprice, which marks the earlier and more elementary phase of appropriation. But even here the conception of Right does not shake itself free from the element of chance. It has ceased to be the caprice of one; it has become the caprice of two; and that is all.

Yet the element of necessity, of a law of justice the same for all and equally binding upon all, has from the outset been dimly present in the idea of Right. It is first brought into distinct consciousness, as it is first brought into positive energy, by the commission of a wrong. The two primary demands of Right—that it shall be universal and that the universality shall take concrete form in the individual will, are then parted; and, in parting, the true nature of each and the rational necessity of the relation between them are for the first time fully disclosed. The reassertion of the Right, by compulsion and punishment, then becomes a duty; and that not on the ground of public security; still less on that of a contract, express or implied, between the criminal and the community; but simply because Right has been set at defiance and can be revindicated in no other way than by a public redressal of the outrage done to the individual in the first place and, through him, to the community and the law of justice in the second. Indeed, to say that punishment is the right of the criminal, as well as of the community, is at bottom no paradox. For that punishment should follow on wrongdoing is as much in the nature of things as that offences themselves should come; and the community which provides that it shall in fact follow does no more than treat the offender as himself too, a reasonable being. In a good sense, no less than in a bad, it ‘gives him his due.’ To refrain from punishing him is to treat him as a lunatic or an idiot; to punish him on the bare ground of public security is to put him on a level with the beasts.

From this account it is plain that abstract Right in its final stage, the punishment of crime, has outstepped the limits of any merely juridical conceptions, and has passed into the region of what we recognise to be morality. It is as an assertion of the moral law, or rather its reassertion against the insolence of crime—it is on this, and this alone, that penal justice can be legitimately defended.

Now the moral law is essentially, and by universal admission, a matter in the first instance of the individual conscience. And for that reason, its appearance at this stage in the development of the idea of Right marks a memorable advance on the purely abstract and external expression of the will—in property—with which Hegel's enquiry started. Henceforth the will has gone within itself; to find in its own inmost nature the law and the realisation of its powers which hitherto it had sought without. It has become, in the strict sense of the term, a subject; it gives the law to itself; it has won its way to ground on which for the first time it can assert its freedom, and in some measure make it good.

But if the first movement of the will, in the sphere of morality, is to fall back within itself, its next necessity is to find some resting-point without. Our first prompting, in this plane of thought, may be to come to ourselves; but that goes hand in hand with an equal need of finding 'something not ourselves,' from which our activities may start and to which they may continually return. That there must be a law of moral action is already implied in the demand that the law shall be my own; and the element of universality is as essential to the moral act as that it shall be the spontaneous utterance of the individual. This is the standing paradox of human action. And to insist upon it is no concession to the necessities of Hegelian logic, but a demand made upon us by the plain facts of moral experience. To be moral, an act must on the one hand be my own: my own purpose, my own resolve, the expression of my own nature, character and ideal. But, on the other hand, it must, in some sense of the term, be a 'good' act; it must have relation to some end which is general as well as individual; it must tend to realise not merely my desire of the moment, but my ideal of myself as a reasonable and responsible being. And, in this sense, even a bad act is moral: for it is either an act directed to the attainment of an ideal 'bad' in itself, but in which I have chosen to find my individual good—'evil, be thou my good'; or, more commonly, it is an act done at the prompting of a passion which I know, more or less clearly, to be irrational, and the yielding to which brings with it a sense of meanness, and possibly of repentance and remorse. The moral consciousness is not merely a consciousness of self; even in its most rudimentary shape it is bound up with the sense of good and evil; that is, of a standard by which I am forced to judge my purpose, if not before, at least after it is carried into effect.

The moral consciousness is of gradual growth; and the stages of its development, according to Hegel, are as follows. In its simplest form it is no more than the demand that my act shall be judged, not by its whole content, by 'each small annexment, petty

consequence,' that it may carry in its train; but solely by what I have chosen to put into it myself, by what was present to my own judgement and consciously grasped by my own imagination at the moment of resolve. This is the baldest form of my right to find myself in my action and nothing but myself. It is the demand to be held responsible for what lay within my range of vision, for what was my conscious and deliberate performance, and for nothing else. But in a conception so vague and so imperfect as this it is impossible to rest. For on the one hand it regards an act as something isolated both from all other acts and from certain of its own consequences, without, however, assigning any principle of selection as between those circumstances which are to be taken and those which may be left. And on the other hand it treats my act as external to myself, as something which I may foresee but which, apart from the mere fact of self-consciousness, has no vital connection with my character and will. It is, in short, still largely tainted by the juridical abstraction from which it is seeking to escape.

The next step must therefore be to give unity to the various elements of my act, regarded as distinct from the will, and to establish a vital bond between my will and it. This is attained by the conceptions of intention and motive, and by all that they involve. The former gives a principle of discrimination between what is essential and what is not essential in the consciousness of the agent, and therefore in his act. The latter picks out that which is most distinctive, most entirely peculiar to the individual, in the will and brings it into the closest possible union with the crucial circumstances of the particular action which, at the given moment, is the object of resolution. In virtue of the former, I can lay my finger on the particular circumstances by which I claim that my action shall be judged. In virtue of the latter, I assign the principle on which the judgement should be passed—the goodness or badness, namely, of the motive that prompted me to act.

But 'good' and 'bad' are vague terms; and we need to ask further in relation to what matter they are employed. In the first instance, there is no content for the will at this stage of its development, beyond the natural impulses, desires and passions of mankind. As natural impulses, they may all be summed up under the general term, happiness or well-being. And it is the satisfaction of the general aim—for instance, the greatest happiness conceivable by me—not of any one desire or impulse in particular that, as a moral agent, I am to seek. My motive is good, if it be directed towards this end; if not, it is bad. The well-being in question is, first and foremost, my own; and it is significant that the period of human history in which the moral consciousness has been most strongly

developed—the period of Christianity—is also the period which has most markedly strengthened and deepened the force of the natural impulses; so that, whether under the form of love or of desire for eternal happiness, they have played a part in modern life which was quite unknown to the ancients. The happiness of the individual, as moralists have commonly felt, is essential to the completeness of the moral ideal.

Yet in the happiness of the individual it is plain that the universal element, which we saw to be essential to morality, can never find full and lasting satisfaction. The range must be widened until it includes the happiness of others as well as of myself. Benevolence, the craving to give pleasure, and reluctance to give pain to others, find their place at this 'moment' of the development of morality. To discover my pleasure in the pleasure of others and my pain in their pain is, in fact, the very refinement of self-seeking. To borrow the title of Goethe's play, it is the final 'triumph of sensibility.'

But the very widening of the range reveals the inadequacy of the conceptions on which this stage of the moral consciousness is based. Both in its particular and its universal aspect it has proved defective; and it has done so, because the two have been held apart instead of being harmoniously combined. The inwardness of the will, in this form, is not a true inwardness; and it has not succeeded in winning its way to solid ground without. For on the one hand we are forced to recognise that the freedom of the will is, so far, no more than a formal freedom; that its determination may come from within, but that it receives its matter—in feeling—from outside. And on the other hand we must own that the will has gone within itself in search of a law which it has failed as yet to find. It has attempted to charge the purely individual and natural impulses with more than they will legitimately hold. In striving to come to itself it has been driven beyond itself; and the presuppositions with which it started have broken down beneath the weight of an interpretation which they are not strong enough nor broad enough to bear.

In view of these contradictions, the moral consciousness is driven to recast its elements throughout. Happiness, as the object of the will, is replaced by the idea of goodness; purity of motive by the sense of duty; and the will itself appears as conscience. Thus both the particular and the universal elements of morality are deepened; both the inwardness of the will and its outward embodiment are in some degree assured. Its inner life is intensified; for from this moment it finds its matter within itself as reason—in its practical form, the good—instead of taking it, as feeling, from without. And this for the first time gives it a sure foothold and starting-point for its pilgrimage through the world



that lies beyond. The good is a principle of action, and the sense of duty a guide, in a fullness of sense that neither happiness nor purity of motive—still less, any of the previous conceptions in which the will has rested—could ever claim to be.

Nor is it only that the individual elements are recast. They are also fused more completely than they had ever been before. Both abstract Right and happiness, hitherto at war with each other, are taken up into the new ideal of the will, the God; and in being so, they lose their opposition and are blended into one harmonious idea. The Good is a higher form of Right; it is more flexible, and gives concrete expression to what, in Right, was an abstract, and commonly an unrealised, ideal. Yet, while room is found for the universal element embodied in previous phases of the practical reason, it is at the same time not denied to the particular element which was the strength of the moral consciousness, in those forms of it which we have traversed hitherto. The claims of the individual find fuller satisfaction in the ideas of duty and the Good than in those of explicit consciousness and of happiness; appeal is made to a higher side of him, to a side that more truly represents himself. And it is just because the universal element is strengthened that the particular element also finds freer scope for its demands. It is in the sphere of duty that both elements for the first time win a fitting field for their energies; it is in that sphere that they first harmoniously unite.

Yet here too it is impossible for the will permanently to rest. Duty, in itself, is an abstract idea; an idea capable, as the result has shown, of infinite expansion; but, as it first presents itself, undeveloped and without articulation. Thus the conception of duty for duty's sake, so long as it remains an abstract conception and nothing more, is found to lead to one of two perversions. It either reverts, under another name and a slightly different form, to the principle of well-being which it professes to discard; in this case it takes its content tacitly from the undisciplined impulses and prejudices of the individual, stamping them with an empty form of moral sanction to which, in reality, they have no title. Or, in a spirit of blind opposition to such a mystification, it sets itself to crush all the natural instincts of humanity and to put up an inhuman, and purely negative, ideal of manhood in their place. In the former we have, to a degree more or less complete, the character of the 'Pharisee'; in the latter, that of the ascetic.

Failing these two by-ways, nothing is left for duty, as an abstract conception, but to weave, or attempt to weave, a system of concrete duties out of its own bowels; on some such principle as that invoked by Kant, who sought to demonstrate the necessity of all concrete duties by the logical formula of contradiction. But

all such attempts are foredoomed to failure. They start by assuming the very facts—the code of morals in force at a given time and in a given society—which they profess to deduce. When marriage, for instance, or property are once established, it is sufficiently obvious that adultery and theft are flatly contradictory to their continuance. But that is no proof that there would have been any contradiction in rejecting them at the first formation of society, or that it was consistency which compelled men to establish them. And again, so far as this fallacy is avoided, there is a constant tendency, noticeable enough in the ethical writings of Kant himself, to adopt the purely ascetic standard, to which reference has been made above.

The truth is that all attempts to found a definite code of practical conduct upon the abstract conception of duty have their place at those periods in which the state of society is radically corrupt and the existing standard incapable of affording rest to men born with any nobility of soul. At other times they sink into the fatal maxim 'The end justifies the means,' and lend themselves to the grossest forms of fanaticism and self-deception; to the iniquities of the League and the Inquisition, or to the more venial aberrations of the Antinomians and Anabaptists. In periods of social decay, in such times as those of Socrates or the Stoics or Kant, they have their use and their justification. They serve as a refuge in which the soul of the just man can take sanctuary; in which, grounding himself on the simple law of duty—the beginning, though not also the middle and the end, of all that is worthy to be called the moral life of man—he may appeal to the conscience of his age and prepare the way for the new and better order of the future. To our own day—and this remains as true now as it was seventy years ago<sup>1</sup>—this service was rendered by Kant. And nowhere do we find at once the undying worth and the inevitable limitations of abstract morality and 'duty for duty's sake' so clearly marked as in the *Metaphysik der Sitten* and the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*.

But, how are these limitations to be overcome? and how is the full work of the moral command to be drawn out? In other words, how is the blank conception of duty to find a content? How is the abstract law to pass into an 'idea'; that idea which is at once a vital principle and its concrete articulation, which at the same time goes out of itself into the fullness of experience, and returns into itself as the unity of the manifold life that has sprung from it? The practical answer to these questions, in a form more or less complete, has been given from the very beginning of man's history. But it is only at rare intervals that it has been explicitly

[<sup>1</sup> Perhaps written c. 1901—70 years after the death of Hegel.]

recognised, as a matter of speculation. It is, in fact, from the conscience—the practical instinct—of the community, and from that alone, that any specification of duties can come. It is in the unwritten code accepted by each community—village, tribe, city or state—that such articulation of the moral command must be discovered. With this transition from the individual to the community a fresh element is brought into the calculation. A new order is opened. We pass from the region of morality in the strict sense—*Moralität*—to what Hegel distinguishes as *Sittlichkeit*; from what, in default of such a distinction, we may call the sphere of abstract to the sphere of concrete and customary morality; or, more briefly, from the sphere of abstract morality to that of conduct.

This passage forms the turning-point of Hegel's whole theory, whether regarded as a theory of moral or of political philosophy. And we may rightly pause for a moment to ask, by what process does he arrive at what appears to be so startling a transition? Is it by what can fairly be described as a logical process, or is it simply by the acceptance of an historical fact? The answer is, by both. And, without going at length into Hegel's conception of logic—a conception already formed when he wrote *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* and consistently maintained during his whole life as writer and as teacher—it is easy for us to see how such a correlation of what to many may appear as unrelated and incompatible elements was to him natural, necessary, and essential to a true conception of the world of human knowledge and activity.

To Hegel the distinction between Logic and Knowledge, between the form and the matter of thought, was unreasonable and unmeaning. The mind of man was to him not an instrument or tool, such as can be applied to a material given from without, but rather a spring of activity, for ever creating its own forms from within. From those forms—crystallised in the successive phases, moral and intellectual, through which mankind has passed in its long history—the soul of man is inseparable. It does not stand aloof from them and above them, but is absorbed successively in each of them until, under the stress of a self-criticism which is positive as well as negative, creative as well as destructive, it passes beyond each. And, so far as it can be distinguished from any one of them, it must be conceived of as the sum—or, more strictly, as the 'promise and potency'—of all of them, past, present and to come. It is only by projecting itself beyond itself that the soul can find itself at all. Yet, in going beyond itself, it is with itself, at every stage of its experience, that it abides; it is to itself, as the ripened fruit of that experience, that it ultimately comes.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 14-30, 42-52, 57-70; *Wissenschaft der Logik*, i. pp. 24-45.

Thus, if in one sense there is nothing internal to the mind—nothing of which we can say ‘This is pure logic, or pure reason’—in another and a deeper sense there is nothing external to it; nothing of which we can say ‘This is material; this has a separate existence as apart from mind’; or, ‘Here the line can be drawn between what the mind has brought and what it finds.’ From this it follows that in no one form of experience, moral or intellectual, can the mind be said to go outside of itself either more or less than in any other. Even the abstract forms of thought, which are specifically the subject of logic—the conceptions of Being, Essence, Idea, and the like—have a twofold relation to what we commonly distinguish from them as the world of fact. On the one hand they presuppose an objective experience; on the other hand they too are a process and not fixed points; they are the inward movement of which the progressive stages of human experience, in its more concrete shape, are the history which has run, or is running, its outward course in time. The forms of logic themselves vary with the matter which they mould and in which, at the same time, they are embodied. ‘The mind is its own place’; but it is a region of which the very soil changes with the change of the vegetation that it nurtures.

Thus, in passing from abstract morality to the morality of conduct—from *Moralität* to *Sittlichkeit*—Hegel is guilty of no solution of continuity. In making such a passage the moral consciousness is but following a path parallel with that which the intellect of man has trod from the very first. What the conception of a manifold world of sense, outside it, is to the soul as the organ of knowledge, that the conception of an ordered code of duties is to the soul regarded as the well-spring of action. And as it is impossible for the soul to take a single step in intellectual experience without the consciousness, more or less distinct, of a separation between itself and the world of knowable objects—a separation which it takes centuries of reflection to break down and to set in its true light as one that is not absolute but relative, not found but made—so it is impossible for the soul, as a principle of will or action, to unfold its powers in any degree, even the slightest, without some faint anticipation of what in the transition from abstract to concrete or customary morality is first brought into clear consciousness; the submission, namely, of the individual to certain specific duties, which he himself had no share in imposing and which he only comes gradually—if at all—to recognise as the adequate and, in their broader outlines, the necessary expression of his own freedom and personality. It is the same plastic power of the soul that works, unconsciously and instinctively, in the one case as in the other. The only difference is that, on the intellectual

side, the soul conceives of itself as accepting the conditions imposed upon it by a material universe beyond it and around it; while, on the moral side, the will of the individual is held to bow, not before material forces, but before the will of the community—the family or tribe or city—in which its destiny is cast. In each case the soul has seemed to pass without itself, and to lose itself. And in each case the ‘without’ has been proved, in the last resort, to lie within. Here, as elsewhere, the soul has lost its individual life, its self-sufficiency, in one sense only to find it in a deeper.

In the region of morals—and a parallel, as has been seen, is to be found in other regions of thought—this is the actual movement of the idea. And it is the actual movement that constitutes its ‘deduction,’ in the philosophical sense, and therefore its logical justification. To look for a logical justification elsewhere—for instance, in the rules of formal logic—is, in fact, to take a standard which has been abstracted from quite other, and indeed lower, fields of thought and apply it to a matter which it is utterly incompetent to measure. Each form of consciousness, whatever its specific nature, carries with it its own criterion of truth; and it is by this alone that it must be judged. The judgement consists in the self-criticism which breaks up the fixed points of each successive experience, shows them to be self-destructive, and resolves them into constituent elements of a wider, and therefore more consistent, whole.<sup>1</sup>

In the present case the fixed points thus fused by the ‘chemic labour’ of thought are the purely external conception of the will, represented by abstract Right, and the purely internal conception of it, embodied in the idea of abstract morality. Both of these disappear as isolated fixtures, but they reappear as the action and reaction of complementary elements, in the conception of customary morality or conduct. The ordered code of duties has, but in a higher form, the objectivity which gave value to the abstract conception of Right. Yet it has also, and again in a higher—because more concrete—form, the subjectivity or inwardness which was the enduring conquest of the abstract conception of Duty.<sup>2</sup> The one-sidedness of previous phases of the moral consciousness has been done away. But the truth, imperfectly embodied in each of them—

So far from vanish, rather grows  
Or decomposes but to recompose,  
Become man’s universe that feels and knows;

<sup>1</sup> See *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 27; *Wissenschaft der Logik*, i. p. 31; *Rechtsphilosophie*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Diese Deduktion (des Sittlichen) ist allein darin enthalten, dass das Recht und das moralische Selbstbewusstseyn an ihnen selbst sich zeigen, darin als in ihr Resultat zurückzugehen’ (*Rechtsphilosophie*, p. 203).

or, if not his universe, the community whose ideals of conduct are his own ideals; whose will, articulated into a detailed code of action, is the freely accepted embodiment of his own; and whose service is, for that reason, not bondage but 'perfect freedom.'

Into the development of this phase of the moral consciousness—through its successive embodiments in the Family, in Civil Society, and finally in the fully constituted State—it is unnecessary for us to go in detail. We may at once hasten to the transition from its final stage, the life of the State, to the only form of corporate life that can be said to lie beyond it; the life of humanity, as writ large in the history of the world.

It is in this wider region that the bearings of the narrower country which we have just traversed are first fully disclosed. There is a sense, doubtless, in which this is true of each and every form of the moral consciousness, or the idea of Right, contained in the foregoing sketch. Each in turn reveals its inability to give consistent or complete expression to the moral life of man; each in turn, after a struggle, surrenders its claims to be self-centred or independent; and each in turn reappears as an element, but no more than an element, of the larger and more comprehensive form of thought in which the struggle, the 'dialectic' of experience, results. In the relation between the individual State and mankind at large something of the same process is assuredly involved; but it is with a difference. Previous stages of the moral consciousness were—logically, if not historically—successive. The State and humanity are logically, as well as historically, simultaneous; both in thought and fact they are co-existent.

This of course carries with it the consequence that the State is not absorbed in the wider world of humanity; but, unlike the earlier embodiments of the idea of Right, maintains its being, in some measure, self-sufficient and apart. Humanity is the medium in which the State moves, the atmosphere from which it draws its sustenance and repairs its strength. But the life of the State is not derived from that of humanity in the first instance, nor merged in it by time. The relation between them is, accordingly, unique; and it is one that needs to be carefully defined. It is, on the one hand, a relation of thought; and, on the other hand, a relation of history or fact.

Considering the close connection between logical and historical development recognised by Hegel, it is neither possible nor necessary to distinguish scrupulously between them at every point. We may begin, however, with dwelling mainly on the historical bearings of the relation. The content of the two spheres, the State and humanity, is essentially the same. In each it is the complex sum of the needs, physical, moral and spiritual, of the individuals

who fall within its scope. But for the individuals of the narrower sphere, the State, the duties that spring from those needs are realised far more consciously, the sense of a common life is present with far more abiding force, than can ever be the case with those of the wider sphere, humanity. With the nations that at any time constitute humanity—or rather, the small number of nations by whom, so far as we can judge, the drama of the world's history is at a given time enacted—the bond of union is much looser. It is only at exceptional moments, and in a limited sense, that one nation becomes aware of sharing to any marked extent in the life of another or of mankind. Accordingly the fullness of life that comes from deliberate participation in the same efforts and a conscious striving for the same ends can seldom, if ever, be felt by humanity as a whole.

But consciousness, though much, is not everything. And where the religious belief or the political ideal of one nation is profoundly modified by the influence of another—where its imaginative or intellectual activity is thrown into an entirely new channel by intercourse with another—it would be absurd to deny that there is an effective community and all the essentials of what we instinctively describe as a common life. The Reformation and the French Revolution are obvious instances of movements that have spread in this way from one nation to another. Each began within the borders of a single people; each grew until it had swept nearly the whole of western Europe within its range. These are glaring examples; but at every moment a like process is going on silently and unmarked before our eyes. One nation touches another at a hundred points, and drinks in its influence as unconsciously as a plant draws light and air.

And here we are brought to the vital point of the relation between the State and humanity, the logical bond on which Hegel naturally lays the greatest stress. The life of the State, as of all other forms of human activity, ultimately rests on thought. It is an expression, one among many others, of 'the idea'; that is, of the speculative energy which finds its full utterance only in Philosophy. But the State, as such, is not and cannot be the direct organ of speculation. The attempt to make it so, as in the *Republic* of Plato, is not only practically mischievous, but it involves a grave misconception both of the idea itself and of the manner in which it is realised in action. Before it can become available for daily use, the idea must lay aside its speculative nature; it must take flesh and blood; it must bend itself to the practical needs, physical as well as moral and intellectual, of a community whose members live a life far removed from philosophy and who cannot be thrust under the rule of the Philosopher-king without sacrificing far more in liberty

and in the spontaneous growth which is the first condition of health, than they gain or can ever hope to gain in speculative truth. Like perceptive knowledge, like Art, like religious faith, the State can never be other than an indirect expression of the idea.

But the idea, though indirectly uttered, must none the less be present. Its light must be reflected in the State; and it must be reflected from the region of pure thought, which is its peculiar domain. The idea—that is, the highest speculative truth attained by men at a given time—is the substance of the State; though it is a substance which must take shape in the common will of its members and in the institutions, necessarily limited and imperfect, that have arisen as the most suitable expression of their collective needs and aims. The life of the State springs from thought; from thought which is capable of purely speculative statement and which is ultimately governed by purely speculative laws. And this remains true, though speculation has taken the form of will and action and has bowed to the limitations that the will and action of finite beings and individual circumstances impose.

This being so, it at once becomes a question: How are the channels between pure thought and its political embodiment to be kept open? How can the State be preserved from sinking into a mere framework of forms out of which all life, at least all ideal life, has fled? It is clear that this can only be done in virtue of a constant effort to keep march with the idea, to follow its movement, and to absorb the successive conquests that it lays at our feet. But what are the conditions under which this is possible? Where, if a material image may be allowed, is the storehouse of the idea? It is only when we know this that we can tell whence the ideal life of the State was drawn in the first instance and where it is afterwards to be recruited. If, as has already been said, the limitations of political endeavour forbid us to look for the source of such life within the State itself, it is clear that only the individual and humanity are left. And a moment's thought is enough to show that the individual, as such, is still more seriously disqualified than the State. The conditions that hem him in are more rigorous; his apprehension of truth is more one-sided. And Hegel, of all men, was bound to look rather to the general movement of the idea in the thought of mankind at large than to the special, and partly accidental, form that it takes in the mind of any individual. It is therefore in the wider whole, in the world of humanity, that each State must seek the progress without which it will inevitably lose its rank among the nations; it is there only that it can find refuge from its own narrowness and partiality. It is the 'soul of the wide world' rather than that of the individual, or even of the State, which, in Hegel's view, is the true 'region of ideas.'



The relation of the State to humanity, of the movement of thought in national history to its movement in universal history, is twofold. It is humanity, the 'universal kingdom,' which at once communicates the laws of that movement to the various 'municipal corporations' that compose it, and which passes final judgement upon their failure or success. In the former aspect, religion—as the intuitive, and therefore most widely accessible, form of thought—is the main, though not the sole, avenue through which the idea finds its way into the daily life of the community. Hence the need of keeping the religious belief of a nation open to the signs and teaching of the time. In the latter aspect, failure to follow the onward march of reason is punished either by slow decay or by the sword. *Die Welt-Geschichte*, in Schiller's words, as adopted by Hegel, *ist das Welt-Gericht*:<sup>1</sup> 'the history of the world is the supreme court at whose bar each nation stands incessantly to plead for life or death.' But it is so only because it is also the source from which each nation both draws and renews the ideal substance of its life. The idea may become our enemy; but only when, of set purpose or by negligence, we have rejected it as our guide. The one function is at least as essential to it as the other; indeed it is rather upon the inspiring than the avenging force of reason that the main stress of Hegel is invariably thrown. That, in fact, is his true defence against the charge of fatalism. He is a fatalist in no sense but that in which all who believe in reason—and believe also that men are free either to obey reason or to disobey her—may be called so.

Such is a brief, and necessarily imperfect, account of what seem to be the main points in the political theory of Hegel. But before leaving it we may well pause to ask what are the most fruitful elements it contains.

And first, it will hardly be disputed that Hegel grasped the connection between politics and morals far more clearly, and that he handled it with far greater insight, than any of his forerunners. What in Vico or Fichte, for instance, was little more than a vague abstraction, dimly understood and imperfectly applied, in Hegel appears as a living principle, articulating itself into full detail and controlling every turn of his enquiry. The belief in a sharp cleavage between State and individual—a belief which for two centuries had dominated political theory and given a new direction to political practice—was at length exposed to unsparing criticism from one whose deep sense of its practical insufficiency was enforced by a reasoned conviction of its speculative absurdity. It was shown to

<sup>1</sup> [These words are taken from an early poem by Schiller called 'Resignation.'—ED.]

be both inconsistent with itself and untrue to the facts of history and of moral experience. The very conscience of the individual—which previous thinkers, and none more decisively than Kant, had held to be absolutely and in the fullest sense a law unto itself—was proved to owe its specific character, its determinate form, to the unconscious working of the practical instinct, the ‘common sense,’ of the community. And, as a necessary consequence, the State was seen to be not the lifeless abstraction, the blank receptacle of individual liberties devised by Rousseau, but a vital participation in all the deepest interests of human life, ‘a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection.’

By either edge of this argument Hegel dealt a fatal blow at the theory which neither the reasoned scepticism of Montesquieu nor the passionate assaults of Burke—still less the tentative objections of Kant and Fichte—had been able seriously to shake. Of all previous writers, Burke was the one who came nearest to forestalling the line of argument taken by Hegel. But Burke wrote as an orator rather than as a philosopher. He was never entirely able to escape from the theory of individual rights which it was his ambition to destroy. And he prejudiced his cause by the blind fury with which he threw himself into the defence of abuses that he, of all men, should have been the first to condemn. By identifying it with an apology for tyranny and superstition, he did his best to discredit the profound plea against ‘constituted anarchy’ which is to be gathered, in magnificent fragments, from his works.

In Hegel also we may doubtless trace an undue leaning towards the established order and an undue distrust of all that threatens to modify or disturb it. But he was at least free from the partisan passion which distorted the vision of Burke. He had a profound insight into human nature and the spiritual needs of his own day. And to this practical wisdom he joined a speculative genius and a power of following an abstract principle into the fullness of its concrete embodiment which have never been surpassed. Before his patient enquiry—and patience, as has been well said, was the true ‘secret of Hegel’—the fatal antagonism between State and individual, which from the days of Hobbes had divided Europe into two hostile camps, vanished into nothing. It was seen to rest upon a double abstraction, a divorce of two things neither of which has any meaning apart from the other. The State, he urges, is not formed by a grant of certain arbitrarily selected powers from the individual, but by taking up into itself the whole circle of his life. The individual, on the other hand, cannot be conceived apart from the community. He is what he is, as a member of it; his whole life—physical, moral and intellectual—is drawn from it.

His material existence, as Plato long since pointed out, depends at every moment upon the aid of his neighbours. His intellectual and moral instincts—the latter, in spite of a common opinion to the contrary, still more obviously than the former—take both form and substance from the beliefs and customs among which his lot is cast. It is in Hegel's insistence on the impossibility of a purely individual morality, and particularly in his proof of Kant's failure to establish it, that we must recognise one of the two chief services rendered by him to political speculation.

And this naturally leads to the other point of crucial importance in the theory of Hegel. That is his conception of progress. Other writers had either ignored progress altogether, or had admitted it as an accidental and isolated tendency which may display itself in each separate field of human energy but which has no vital connection with man's being as a whole. Hegel was the earliest to see the futility of this separation. Progress is to him not merely change, not even change according to an intelligible law and to a determined goal. It is all this, but it is much more. It is change according to a law which at every step is one with the law of reason, and which, in its wider bearings at any rate, is not to be disputed except by those who, consciously or unconsciously, are prepared to carry the assault further and to question the workings of reason in the commonest experience. He was, in fact, the first thinker to bring the moral and political activity of man into line with his intellectual energies; the first to treat reason in all its manifestations as one and indivisible.

It was a necessary consequence of this view that political progress, as he conceived it, was no longer a matter of merely empirical proof, still less of unquestioning faith—though, for certain purposes, it may legitimately be represented under either of these lights—but a necessity springing from the deepest roots of experience and therefore from the reason, of which experience is only the inseparable form. The progress we discern in History and the outward life of man is only another side of the law which regulates the life of nature, the expression of man's soul in art or religion, and the inward movement of his speculative thought. In the case of nature this is doubtless, from one point of view, merely an analogy. For nature must always contain an element more alien and, as we say, more external to man than is to be found in any other field of his experience. Yet here too man brings far more than he finds and gives far more than he receives. All that is determinate in our knowledge of nature, all save the bare consciousness of something beyond our control in nature, is the creation of thought. In nature, as in the rest of our experience, thought is the object contemplated as well as the subject that contemplates it. So far

forth, therefore—and with the limitation above indicated—the work of reason in nature ceases to be a mere analogy to its work in art or religion or speculation. It is in very truth the same thing, though taking to itself a different form, as it must needs do when it applies itself to a different matter.

Nor is it possible to separate between one department of our experience and another. The reason of man has developed as a whole; and it would be a futile task to attempt distinguishing between the growth it has drawn from one field of its energies and what it has gathered from any other. Accident has again and again directed its growth in one direction, to the apparent neglect of all the rest. But in the long run such one-sidedness has commonly redressed itself; and the fresh force gained, the fresh powers acquired, in one department have been applied, with the needful modifications, to the whole circle of man's reason and experience. Who can say, for instance, how much the study of Biology during the last century has owed to the ideas formulated by Hegel and his contemporaries in Philosophy, or how much the study of man's performance in Art and History is indebted to both?

Thus, both consciously and unconsciously, reason is for ever weaving a bond of union between the most diverse spheres of her operation. And, as commonly happens, it is the unconscious part of this work that is the more important, as it is also the part on which Hegel was the more wont to dwell. The fact is that this point lies at the very centre of Hegel's achievement in Philosophy; and nowhere is it of more vital importance than in its bearing on the conception of progress. That there should be progress in science, or even in speculative thought, where the problems to be solved are definite and where each generation of enquirers starts from the vantage-ground gained by all that have gone before, seems to most men natural enough. But that we are entitled to feel an equal assurance of progress in the more purely instinctive and creative spheres of reason—in Art, for instance, or in moral and political endeavour—that is a belief which cannot be said to have held the smallest influence on the minds of men till the closing years of last century, and which even now is stoutly combated or regarded with complete indifference by the majority.

And this leads us to ask whether the sense in which such men deny progress and the sense in which Hegel affirms it are indeed the same. The probability is that, when men deny or speak of the attempt to establish it as trifling, what they have in view is the extensive meaning of the term. The kind of question that suggests itself to their mind is: Are modern communities, on the whole, happier and more prosperous than the ancient—say, than Athens or Rome? Is there less of crime and of grinding misery? Do men,

on the average, approach more nearly to the prevailing standard of public and private virtue in the present day than in the past? Now these are questions which may perhaps justly be described as trifling. They are questions which rather concern the moralist than the political philosopher and which, even for the moralist, have little practical importance, seeing that in any case he knows his own duty and will not know it any the better for the further knowledge that others before him have succeeded either better or worse than he in the task he has set himself to do.

With the other, the intensive, sense of progress it is very different. There we are concerned, not with a multitude of details obscurely known and, even when known, beyond our power to interpret and compare; but with the moral and spiritual ideals of various communities and the manner in which the ideal of one age has sprung, by the natural process of thought, from that of the age before. Conceived in this sense, the question is not only more within compass but beyond comparison more fruitful than it can ever be in the form given above. And this is the sense which Hegel invariably attaches to progress. History is to him the record of the gradual development of man's practical reason, of his moral and spiritual ideals.

Understood in this sense, it is clear that the political activity of man, as recorded in History, stands in the closest possible connection with his intellectual life. And if, as will hardly be disputed, there is progress in the latter—a progress none the less real because it has more than once suffered apparent interruption—it is vain to deny the reality of the conception, as applied also to the former. It was indeed the chief service of Hegel, in all that he wrote and taught, to show the oneness of reason and the impossibility of severing one sphere of her activity from any of the others. And the *Philosophie des Rechts*, together with large parts of the *Encyklopädie* and the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, is an attempt to work out this conception in detail, as applied to politics. Step by step, it traces in the field of politics the same 'dialectical movement' of the idea that we find also in nature, in religion, and in speculative thought. The constant progress from the more to the less abstract, from the one-sidedness of bare affirmation through an equally one-sided negation to the larger affirmation which includes the elements contained in both the foregoing stages of development and unites what in them were held apart, so leaving the way free for a fresh advance, after the same method, to a still fuller and more concrete embodiment of the idea—all this appears as much in the political history of man as through the story of his development in science, or religion, or speculation. Nor, as has already been said, is this resemblance between the one field of thought and the others a mere

analogy. It springs from the fact that it is the same reason which works in all. It springs also from the predominant influence exercised by the more inward and spiritual workings of reason—in particular by religion and speculative thought—however little that influence may consciously be felt, upon the more outward and practical.

Thus, if Hegel believes in political progress, it is on the one hand because he fixes his eye rather on the inward than on the outward aspects of political movement, rather on the development of the ideas that have inspired action than on the action, in and for itself; and on the other hand because he is firmly convinced—and the whole of his Philosophy is a reasoned demonstration of his conviction—that throughout the whole course of man's history action is dominated by thought, that in the long run it is only thought that counts.

Like other thinkers, Hegel was doubtless at times liable to caricature his own deepest principles. But in him, as in others, such exaggerations are in fact a momentary failure to grasp the true significance of his own teaching and the full force of his own ideas. They betray not so much an excess as a defect of readiness to 'follow the argument whithersoever it may lead.' Thus when he discovers the last word of political wisdom, the coping-stone of the fabric raised by three thousand years of history, in the Prussian Constitution,<sup>1</sup> it is difficult for any man not a Prussian to remain grave. The 'long run' has become so very short; the passing fashion of a day is solemnly made the type and symbol of eternity.

In the same way his defiant saying—'Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig': 'The real is the rational, and the rational is the real'—is clearly liable to strange abuse. It has been abused by bigots of the old order; it has been abused also, with perhaps less of provocation, by the fanatics of revolution. Even Hegel himself is not free from a disposition to applaud the existing fact just because it is a fact, and to deify successful brutality just because it has succeeded. And it is obvious that, so far as he gives the rein to this tendency, he is practically identifying reason with unreason, and denying the idea of progress which it was among his chief services to define and to enforce. But these are shortcomings for which it is easy to allow. And in themselves the offending words express no more than the truth which lies at the bottom of all Philosophy worthy of the name; the conviction that both in our own spirit and in the world around

<sup>1</sup> [No doubt a reference to the last pages of *Philosophie der Geschichte: Werke*, ix. p. 545 (ed. 1848). But perhaps the passage hardly justifies the comment in the text.—ED.]

us the one enduring thing is reason, and that man has, properly speaking, no task but to discover it and to fight for it.

It is the glory of Hegel and his lasting significance in the history of thought that, in an age of great thinkers, he realised this truth more firmly and wrought it out in a more concrete form and with more unwearying patience than any of his contemporaries, or indeed than any save the two or three greatest of his forerunners. And if we ask what were his contributions to Political Philosophy in particular, the answer must be: he was the first thinker to grasp the full scope of the historical method; the first to recognise the debt of the individual conscience to the instinctive sense of the community; and the first to ground the idea of progress, not on accidental circumstances, but on the very nature of reason. Previous thinkers had fixed an impassable barrier between the moral and the political growth of man, and again between his speculative reason and his practical. It was the task of Hegel to show that both distinctions were essentially abstract and unreal.

## CHAPTER V

### COMTE

WITH Hegel it might have seemed that Philosophy had passed for ever from the region of Utopias. With Comte, as indeed with St. Simon and Fourier before him, it once more returned beneath their sway. Yet there is a difference. The Utopias of the eighteenth century had made an idol of the individual; those of the nineteenth sacrifice everything to the community or the State. The earlier Utopias defied history; the later ones, that of Comte at any rate, have at least sought to build their dreams of the future upon the experience of the past. In all this the influence of Hegel, indirect though it may be, is unmistakable. Without Hegel, or rather without the ideas which found their best and fullest utterance in Hegel, the work of Comte would have been impossible.

But if the *Politique Positive* bears witness to the penetrating influence of Hegel and his fellow workers, it also, and still more directly, reflects the reaction against the ideas of the Revolution. The theory of Hegel was in itself, no doubt, hostile in most points to those ideas; but few things are more remarkable than its almost entire freedom from reactionary alarms. In Comte, as will be seen, such alarms play no inconsiderable part. They give to a theory, in large measure parallel to that of the German thinker, a form and colour such as could hardly have presented themselves except to a Frenchman who had grown up under the terror of the great upheaval. That, in fact, is the historical importance of Comte. He is, if not the most representative, at least the deepest and the most fruitful of those political theorists who, taking alarm at the Revolution, have set themselves to stem the tide of democracy and to guide the prevailing currents of thought and action into other channels. So far, his work may be said to resemble that attempted in one way by Carlyle and in another by such writers as Coleridge and de Maistre. What distinguishes him from them is the thoroughness with which he does his task and the unflinching boldness with which he strives to free his mind from current assumptions. While they halt at a half-way house, at some chapel or



barrack provided by the piety or valour of the past, he battles his way to the end of the journey, resolved not to rest on any ground that his own thought has not chosen or in any quarters that his own hands have not built. Thus, if he is the most reactionary, he is also the most revolutionary of modern writers. In that double character lies at once his personal distinction and his historical significance.

It has been said that, in many respects, the theory of Comte recalls the theory of Hegel. Like Hegel, he starts, not from the individual, but from the community. Like Hegel, he rests his system on the historical method. Like Hegel, he regards the social, no less than the intellectual and spiritual, life of man as being matter of gradual and continuous development. But he is in no sense a mere French replica of Hegel. As might have been expected from so original and acute a mind, he deepens, strengthens and modifies—in some ways doubtless for the better—the lines of speculation laid down by his great forerunner. The most significant of these modifications flow, as will be seen hereafter, from a difference in his conception of man's intellect, both in itself and in its relation to the other elements of human nature. To Hegel, as has been sufficiently shown, the reason is apt to present itself as a kind of blind force, over which the individual has no control, by which he is possessed, mastered, overruled as by a higher power. The result is that not only is the individual reason in danger of losing itself in that of the community or the race, but the individual himself is emptied, or at least seems to be emptied, of all other faculties and reduced to little more than an intellectual machine. It is the lasting service of Comte both to have given the individual reason fair scope as against that of the community and to have left room, it may be more room than enough, for the play of the other faculties, in particular of love and sympathy, as against pure intellect or the instinct of logical abstraction. No doubt, the defects which Comte thus corrected, unconsciously enough, in the work of Hegel are, in some sense, more apparent than real. They belong rather to the form in which Hegel's theory is stated than to the theory itself. None the less, it is well that Comte should have freed the theory from the stiffness of its original statement and won for it, though in a shape far less satisfactory, a hearing before a wider world than the class-rooms of Jena and Berlin. Hegel has had students; Comte, with less to say and with less talent for saying it, has made disciples.

The fatal flaw in the work of Comte is its want of a sound basis in speculation. It is not only that the problems of moral philosophy are left entirely untouched. That in itself would have been a grave omission; in a system which recognises so close a bond between

the political and the moral life of man, it is doubly grave; and, in view of the vast space allotted to those purely scientific questions which, important as they are, have yet little or no direct bearing upon the matter in hand, it is to the last degree misleading and perverse. That, however, is not all. Large as is the place assigned to scientific questions in Comte's political theory, he makes no serious attempt to sift the speculative problems which lie at their root; and in the few passages where he touches on such matters, he betrays a confusion of mind, an inability to understand what exactly are the points at issue, which contrasts decisively with the clear-sightedness and profundity of Hegel. Hence the glaring inconsistencies between his earlier and his later work; hence it was that the man who had begun with an uncompromising attempt to apply the methods and results of natural science to the individual and collective life of man, ended with a helpless reversion to the craziest dreams and the most haphazard methods of the theologians and metaphysicians. He had rejected all metaphysics, all enquiry into the speculative grounds of action and scientific thought, as a childish delusion; he paid the penalty in the credulity with which, for want of such an enquiry, he installed the 'subjective method'—and in his hands this meant the absolute negation both of the methods and the results of science—as the only method admissible in political, social and even scientific investigation. He began by proclaiming the emancipation of man from the superstitions of the past; he ended by finding salvation in a pompous travesty of the medieval Papacy.

What, then, exactly is the theory of Comte, and what are the cardinal principles on which it rests? In answering these questions we must distinguish between the historical foundation laid by Comte and the fabric of theory which he raises on it. It is with the former naturally that we start.

Political life, he urges, like all the other activities of man—of which indeed it is the crown and, in some sense, the summing up—passes through three stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the 'positive' or scientific. In the first of these no inherent invariable law is recognised; everything is referred to the arbitrary will of a higher power or of some man, or body of men, regarded as the chosen representative of such a power. Instances of societies organised in this manner are the monarchies of primitive tribes, the theocracy of the Jews, the republic of early Rome; or, to come to later ages, the medieval Papacy and, in theory, the monarchies of Western Europe as idealised by the champions of divine right.

The second stage is, in the last resort, identical with the first. Like the first, it assigns an arbitrary and irrational character to the history of the past. Like the first, it attributes the power of

modifying the 'social organism,' and consequently human nature, indefinitely to all governments, past, present and to come. It differs from its predecessor only in replacing the idea of a personal god, a 'magnified and non-natural man,' by abstractions such as Right and Nature. No doubt the metaphysical conception, irrational as it is, marks an advance, historically speaking, upon the theological. Its mission was to break up the fabric of the past and to prepare the ground for the new building to be reared by the scientific spirit of the future. But its function is purely negative and destructive. It is powerless to construct; and, when credited with the ability to do so, it brings forth nothing but anarchy and bloodshed. As a theory, it has been the dominating influence on European thought for the last three centuries; increasingly so during the last hundred years, thanks to the *Contrat Social* of Rousseau. Once, and only once, has it been put unreservedly in practice, at the time of the French Revolution.

The third stage, that of 'positive' conviction, differs radically from both those that have gone before it. For their arbitrary assumptions and capricious methods it substitutes the method of rigorous observation and the principle that political life, no less than nature, is regulated by discoverable law; in other words, that every element in the social body is conditioned by the rest, and that every step in its growth depends upon all the steps that have been taken before. Thus the positive spirit rejects all enquiry alike into causes, whether first or final, and into rights. It confines itself to experience; and behind experience it traces the working of laws as definite as those which govern the facts of natural science, though more subject to variation and modification. Even these modifications, however, are themselves but the expression of a general law, already observable in the ascending scale of the natural sciences and constituting, in fact, the vital principle of their classification. The lower sciences, mathematics and astronomy, are those which are the most abstract and the most general, and consequently the least subject to uncertainty or variation; while the higher sciences—physics, chemistry and biology—just because they are the higher, show a progressive decrease in abstractness and in generality, and a corresponding increase of complexity and consequently of uncertainty and liability to variation. Hence it is in the nature of things that the laws which regulate the social life of man, the laws of 'sociology,' being of incomparably greater complexity, involving conditions far more intricate than those of any inferior science, should be both more difficult to discover and more exposed to modifying influences, whether of climate and soil or of human will and energy, than any other. Understanding sociological law in this sense and, as has been said, rejecting all chimerical notions such as

that of indefeasible rights or universal equality, the positive spirit will set itself to master the conditions which determine the social life of man, with a view to modifying them where experience shows that to be possible, and, where it is not possible, to insisting that they shall be obeyed.

The positive spirit—whose reign, though announced by many signs in the past, is now only about to open—is thus seen to be at once less and more revolutionary than the metaphysical. Less revolutionary, in that it submits without questioning to the inevitable conditions which determine the activities of man, whether as an individual or in society. More so, in that, having studied—as neither the theologians nor the metaphysicians would ever do—the exact nature of those activities and of the conditions under which they work, it has both a more definite ideal of what human society is capable of becoming and a clearer view of the steps by which that ideal may be reached. It knows better both what to fight for and how to fight for it. To define the ideal of humanity and to point out the steps that should be taken for its attainment is the aim of Comte's later work, the *Politique Positive*, as to determine the principles and methods of political study was the main object of his earlier work, or rather so much of it as bears upon human society, *La Philosophie Positive*.

Having roughly indicated the general principles and methods laid down by Comte for the guidance of his enquiry, we have now to ask: What are the laws that he draws from that enquiry, and what is the reconstruction that he proposes as its result?

If there is one thing we learn from history—and the mere physical structure of man's brain, no less than the commonest experience of life, enforces the lesson—it is that the intellect counts for less than the emotional faculties. It is not only, nor even chiefly, that the affections, being more intense, call more of man's energies into play than the exercise of his intellectual powers. If this were all, Comte's protest would obviously have been made on behalf of the selfish no less than the unselfish, the 'egoistic' no less than the 'altruistic' affections; and it might reasonably have been urged that, inasmuch as the former are admittedly stronger than the latter, or even than the latter and the intellect combined, the quarrel between intellect and emotion might well have been left to settle itself. In fact, however, he distinguishes with even vehement insistence between the selfish instincts of our nature and the unselfish; and it is on behalf of the latter that he makes his appeal. The former he leaves, for the present purpose, entirely out of account; assuming—as, in spite of Bentham and his school, he was perhaps entitled to do—that no man will now look to selfishness, however enlightened, either as the binding principle of

society or as the dominant faculty in the 'good will' of the individual. He takes for granted that the choice of such a principle and such a dominant faculty must lie between the intellect and the 'altruistic' instincts, and he contends that the former is useless and even mischievous unless it submits to follow the guidance of the latter; that our sense of social duty, in other words, our love for our neighbour and mankind, must fix the end of all our endeavours, leaving to the intellect nothing more than the task of determining the means.

So restricted, the intellect will still have ample scope for its energies; for, however much we may learn within these limits, we shall never cease to have room, as well as need, for learning more. But a bitter experience has taught us that, unless this limitation be accepted, not only will the moral and social life of man be wrecked, but the very intellect will fritter itself away. It will have no choice save, on the one hand, to lose itself more and more in the frivolous details of aimless specialisation; or, on the other hand, to seek an unification, an objective and absolute basis, for the dispersed *data* of our knowledge, which, considering the purely subjective and relative character of that knowledge, is for ever denied to us.

Placed in a world the true nature of which is eternally concealed from us—a world of which we can know nothing further than the phenomenal aspect, and that only in scattered fragments—we cannot profitably employ our intellect save in that field, the practical interests of man, which alone is capable of being fully known to us, and with that object which alone is capable of being fully realised, the direct service of mankind. Here the intellect can aid us, and aid us abundantly. It can do so in two distinct ways. Generally, by the mere proof it offers us at every moment of our existence that we live under a reign of law which we have had no hand in fashioning and which, beyond the narrowest limits, we are powerless to modify and still more powerless to control. Specifically, by the materials it places within our reach for directing the material, moral and spiritual progress of mankind, or, in Bacon's language, 'for the relief of man's estate.'

Further than this, however, the intellect cannot go. In other words, no synthesis open to it can be anything more than a 'subjective synthesis.' The world, as a whole, is and will for ever remain a riddle to man. The only principle by which he can hope to bring order into the chaos is one that he does not find but bring; one that is not inherent, or at least not discoverable, in the nature of things, but imposed upon them by man himself, and for his own purposes, from without: the principle, that is, of his own necessities, of what is necessary for his own physical, and still more for his own moral and spiritual welfare.

This, then, is the first law that Comte draws from his enquiry, the first stage in the 'positive' reconstruction of human nature and society. The intellect, both of fact and of right, is but a secondary power; and in any healthy organisation of society, as in any sound education of the individual, the intellectual needs and aspirations of man should be strictly subordinated, made rigidly subservient, to his moral and spiritual growth.

This conclusion, as we have seen, is rested by Comte in part upon the phrenological doctrine, the attempted localisation of the various faculties in distinct organs of the brain, which he adapted from the speculations of Gall. In the main, however, as he repeatedly insists, it is founded on a 'sociological' or, as he somewhat unfortunately calls it, a 'subjective' basis; upon a consideration of the relation which the individual holds towards society. In Comte's view—and this is, in truth, the most fruitful part of his theory—the individual, so far from being the ultimate reality, the vital unit, in the world of man, is in fact a mere abstraction of the metaphysicians. The individual is what he is solely in virtue of the character he has inherited from his forefathers and of the moulding he has received from his surroundings. It is the individual that is a fiction, the community alone that has reality. That being the case, it is what binds man to his fellows, not what separates him from them, that constitutes the true kernel of his being; it is the 'heart,' not the intellect, that must rule. To restore the 'heart' to its due authority, to put an end to the 'long revolt of the intellect' against its rightful master, is the first task of the positive philosophy.

This principle, once admitted, leads, in Comte's hands, to a variety of applications. In the first place, he sweeps away all those institutions, academical or otherwise, which involve the assumption that intellectual study is, or can be, an end in itself. Their place is taken—and much more than taken—by the 'new priesthood,' the 'spiritual power,' of the Comtist polity; and their functions, vast as they are, may from Comte's own point of view be fairly justified on the ground that they are moral rather than intellectual. Such an organisation, inheriting all the virtues of the Catholic priesthood and none of its defects, will wield spiritual authority over the new world which is destined to take shape under the inspiration of the positive teaching. It will be entrusted—in part directly, in part, through its influence over the mothers, indirectly—with the education of the young; and its consultative authority in all matters intellectual, moral and social will be recognised by the community at large. Its mission will thus be to keep alive the positive spirit in a world which, under the pressure of physical needs, will ever be too ready to forget its teaching.

And to do so effectively, it must never suffer itself to grasp at material power; its weapons must always be spiritual, not temporal; it must trust, not to force, nor even to command, but to influence and persuasion. It must be in the world, but not of it. Its task is not to dragoon men into love and reason—that were impossible and, if possible, corrupting both to the one side and the other—but by persistent reason to maintain the intellectual foundation and by unfailing love to uphold and, where possible, to extend the moral superstructure of the positive faith.

Society, it is true, will never cease to need material guidance; and that guidance must, in the last resort, be backed by force. But such guidance must be given, and such force applied, by a power entirely distinct from that which provides for the spiritual wants of the community. The faculties needed for material guidance differ too widely from those that carry spiritual influence to be united in the same person. The practical statesman will tend more and more to concern himself with industrial conditions, the true field for the activities of the modern State. The spiritual teacher, whose interests are necessarily either speculative or moral, will never consent to limit himself to the details of industrial life, to judge wisely of which demands not speculative genius but practical talent, not sympathy but coolness. Even were he capable of acquiring the practical judgement necessary for such purposes, his distinctive quality would soon be blunted in the process; the virtue would go out of him. Hence it is that the division between the temporal and spiritual powers foreshadowed by the medieval Church must for ever remain, though under a fuller and deeper form than was possible to the Papacy, a fixed principle of the positive polity.

But how can we define more precisely the true function of either power, how may we determine the relative importance of each? That question is best answered by a reference to the view which Comte takes of the relation between the intellect and the heart. He had already pronounced the heart to be both the servant and master of the intellect; its servant, in that the truths which it is the duty of man to embody in action and character must necessarily be discovered by the intellect; its master, in that all intellectual enquiry must be directed to the service of humanity. In other words, the subjection of the intellect to the heart, the subordination of intellectual curiosity to the 'relief of man's estate,' is the first truth, the cardinal axiom, established by the intellect; the very first step taken by the intellect reveals to it the invalidity of its own claims and forces it to abdicate in favour of its lawful sovereign.

The same reasoning applies to the relation between the spiritual

and the temporal power. The former is at once the servant and the master of the latter. Its servant in that, like all the rest of the community, it works in and through the temporal power and the material interests which that power represents. Its master in that, on the intellectual side, it determines the end to be pursued by the temporal power and, on the moral side, it gives the atmosphere in which that power and, through it, the whole community live and move and have their being. It is clear that the character of servant is here, as in the parallel case, completely overshadowed by that of master. The spiritual power both lays down the general principles of the community and, in cases of doubt, determines the concrete application which those principles are to take. The new priesthood, like the old, has in fact the power of the keys.

These, then, are the two cardinal articles of the positivist creed; the subordination of pure intellect to the moral and spiritual element in the individual; and the rigorous separation between the temporal and the spiritual power—not to say, the complete enslavement of the former to the latter—in the State. Starting from these, Comte inevitably arrives at an ideal of political life very different from that which has prevailed in modern times, especially since the days of the French Revolution. Temporal interests—the interests of the State, as such—being thus restricted have naturally lost their savour for the positivist mind. And it is no wonder that Comte should have thought them beneath the notice of the community at large. For the public supervision and the popular discussion—in one word, for the representative system—which has come to be identified with the idea of government in Western Europe he proposes to substitute a dictatorship of three bankers, reserving to the community only the ‘sacred right of insurrection’ in case they misbehave. The representative body, it is true, he does not utterly abolish, but he reduces its functions within the narrowest limits. All he allows it to do is to vote a budget every third year—a limitation which would have gone far to satisfy the first Napoleon and which would probably have seemed excessive to the second William. Two facts, indeed, are enough to show Comte’s withering scorn for parliamentary government. He habitually describes the representative assembly as a ‘local body,’ and he applauded the *coup d’État* of Napoleon the Little. His views may be summed up in one sentence: the less time spent by the community on politics, the better.

But if the community can afford to shuffle off the burden of its temporal interests on to other shoulders, that is by no means the case with its spiritual concerns. The chief support of the spiritual power against the malpractices or the encroachments of



the temporal will, in fact, come from the two sections of the community which must always form by far the greater part of it but which hitherto have received little or no attention; of the kind that alone is worth having, from the government. These are the working classes—the ‘proletaries,’ as Comte habitually calls them—and the women. They, and they alone of existing classes, are still unspoiled; and if they can only be saved from the strife of tongues, which is the curse of modern politics, they will always remain so. They therefore will instinctively see the importance of maintaining intact both the new priesthood and the inestimable interests which it officially represents. That is their true function; there, and not in what is called public life, lies their true sphere of influence. In the same way, it is with these two bodies—with the women and the working classes—that the real task of the priesthood will always be found. They form the majority of the community, and they are its salt. So long as its influence with them is unshaken, the priesthood has nothing to fear.

From all this it is not difficult to divine what are Comte’s opinions on the practical questions which have divided the world since the French Revolution; on property, marriage and the position of women. In all these matters he is essentially conservative. Communism he condemns as unnatural. Property is, in his eyes, not a prize to be coveted for the advantage of the individual, but a burden to be borne for the good of the community. Even thrift, in his opinion, is a more than doubtful gain. The ideal of the working classes, he considers, should be not to better themselves in the vulgar sense, but to make the best, both for themselves and their fellows, of the lot in which they were born; not to raise themselves, as individuals, above their fellows, but to rise, with their fellows, to a higher moral and spiritual plane. Marriage he holds to be one of the chief conquests, perhaps the chief one, gained by humanity over primitive barbarism; any attempt to impair its sanctity he regards as wanton and wicked. Finally, both by nature and the efforts of past ages the place of woman has, in his view, been unalterably fixed. Her mission is not the same as man’s. Neither by intellect nor by character is she suited for the active life of man. If she seeks to follow him there, she achieves nothing but a bad imitation both of his qualities and his defects. On the other hand, in her own sphere, in the life of the family, she has a work other, and indeed higher, than what is open to man. It is her task to train the young; to keep the emotional life of the whole community clear and healthy; to be a perpetual fountain of such love and sympathy as shall ‘flow through the deeds’ of the whole mass and make them pure.

Thus the general framework of society is left by Comte pretty

much as he found it—or rather, perhaps, as he would have found it three centuries ago. Classes remain, property remains, marriage and the position of women stay as they were. Even the old antithesis between Church and State is still preserved. What Comte does is to take the old forms and to fill them with an entirely new meaning. Nowhere does this appear more strongly than in the last and most important effort of the positivist reconstruction, the remodelling of religion.

By no man could the need of religion have been felt more deeply or urged more strongly than it is by Comte. By no man could a stranger, a more utterly unfamiliar answer have been given to the question—What is religion?—than is given by him. Yet in common justice it must be admitted that, in building ‘the religion of the future,’ he makes an honest effort to base his fabric upon the experience of the past. What, he asks, are the elements—the primary instincts, as they are seen to be when stripped of all accidents and disguises—which meet to form what the world knows as the religious spirit? On the intellectual side they are love of truth and the craving to find unity in our experience. On the moral side they have a twofold character; on the one hand, the spirit of reverence, of submission to the order of nature, which the intellectual conclusions of the positive faith, the perception that we live under the reign of invariable law, necessarily work in our heart; on the other hand, the spirit of love towards mankind at large which is equally justified by the results of our intellectual enquiry and without which our intellectual efforts would lose themselves in frivolous detail and human activity as we know it—as that to which unselfish, no less than selfish, instincts are indispensable—would be impossible.

That spirit of love, when further sifted, is seen in its turn to contain more than one element. To Comte, as in a different way to Goethe, it means three things: reverence for that which is above us—humanity, as the whole in virtue of which alone the individual has any definite character or content, and as the power which mediates between the individual and the world of external nature; attachment to that which is around us, to those whom we may fairly regard as on a level with ourselves; and benevolence to that which is beneath us, to those who are in any way dependent on our care. And these are typified respectively in the diverse feelings which a man properly holds towards the three generations—mother, wife and daughter—with which he is naturally brought in contact.

The central point of this conception is clearly the idea of humanity. It is through humanity, through the stored knowledge and accumulated skill of mankind, that the individual wages his

lifelong struggle against the iron law of nature. It is from humanity that he draws his own spiritual and moral life. It is in humanity that he finds the only field for the exercise of his noblest powers, the powers of forethought and self-sacrifice and love. It is therefore to humanity, as the source indirectly of all his knowledge and directly of all that is noblest in his moral nature, that the reverence, formerly given to an imaginary God, is henceforth irrevocably due.

It may be objected that external nature, having—by Comte's own confession—a large part in the moulding of man's destiny, should by rights have a large share also in his veneration. Comte himself may be said to anticipate the objection, and to meet it partly by the plea that nature, in herself, is a mechanical power and that towards such a power it is impossible to feel anything that can, by the utmost stretch, be called reverence; partly by showing that to us nature means not only the iron law which controls our destiny from without, but also, and just as much, the modifications which the skill and knowledge of man have gradually imposed upon that law and which entitle him to see in it a reflection of his own will and intellect from within. Hence it is that nature, in Comte's view, is mediated to the individual through humanity; and that, in a world where all knowledge is not absolute but relative, veneration is due not to that which absolute knowledge, if such a thing were conceivable, might possibly show to be the ultimate master of our destiny—a power paramount both to nature and to humanity—but to that with which we stand in immediate and certain relation; not to the remote and problematic providence of the old dispensation, but to the direct and demonstrated providence of the new; in one word, not to God but to humanity.

In the being of religion, so conceived, there is a double strand. On the one side there is the intellectual process which has slowly built up for us the world of external nature. On the other side there is the moral process which has created the 'social organism' and, with it, the world of spiritual interests and duties in which every individual, willingly or unwillingly, has to play his part. The two processes have from the first been carried forward simultaneously but independently. At times, and never more than in the nineteenth century, it has seemed as though the results of the one were contrary to those of the other. The intellectual process has led men more and more generally to a purely mechanical and materialist interpretation of the world; while the moral and spiritual process has more and more tended to prove that such an interpretation is impossible. The contradiction, however, is only in appearance. And it has been the task of the positive philosophy to pierce through the apparent conflict to the harmony

which underlies it. This task it has accomplished in two distinct ways.

As a critical and destructive process, it has swept from men's minds the last vestiges of that belief in God which in the past led them to consider nature as the revelation of his power and, consequently, as an object of study to be pursued for its own sake and altogether apart from what it has to offer for the service of mankind. And, as this belief in the intrinsic worth of scientific knowledge long survived that belief in God which alone formed its justification, it is clear that the positive faith, which smites indifferently at the one belief and at the other, has entirely changed the attitude of man towards the world of nature.

As a constructive process, on the other hand, the positive philosophy has conclusively shown that, necessary as is the conception of humanity to the comprehension of man's place in the world of action and to the right performance of his duties towards other men, it is no less essential to his comprehension of the world of nature. The old belief in the possibility of an absolute knowledge of nature has broken down with the old belief in the possibility of knowing God. And if we are to find any unity in our study of the external world, which shall take the place of the false unity now discarded, it can only be by confining our view to those questions which promise direct utility to mankind; in other words, by resolutely conceiving that unity not as absolute, but as relative to the practical needs of humanity at large.

To establish these two conclusions, the impossibility of an absolute principle of scientific knowledge and the true nature of the relative principle—to expel God from the world both of knowledge and of action, and to put humanity in his place—has been the twofold task, destructive and constructive, of the positive philosophy. Thanks to that philosophy, the contradictions between the intellectual and the moral life of man, which had haunted the earlier stages of his history, are at length brought into harmony. The banishment of God from the world of nature, which for the moment seemed to intensify those contradictions, is shown to be the first step towards their reconciliation. It is the negative condition, without which the subsequent positive construction would have been impossible. It leaves the way open for applying to the world of nature, and to the intellectual process by which that world is built up, the same principle of unity which has already, and on grounds entirely independent, been found to be the dominant principle in the world of moral activity. That principle, as has been sufficiently shown, is the idea of humanity. It is only in the light of the needs of humanity that the endless chaos of nature can be brought into focus. It is only by devotion

to the service of humanity that the jarring instincts of the individual heart can be lifted into harmony. It is in the idea of humanity that the clue both to the intellectual and the moral life of man must be sought. It is in the worship of humanity, therefore, that the true religion is to be found.

Thus it is that all the conditions, after which the earlier religions have vainly striven, are found to be at length satisfied by the 'Religion of Humanity.' Other religions have sought to satisfy the craving at once for truth and for that which shall give unity to our intellectual experience. All, however, have started from an assumption which at the best is an unprovable and probably a false assumption. All therefore have found themselves in conflict with the commonest facts of our experience. So far from attaining unity, all of them, if they would keep up even a semblance of truth, have been driven to draw a sharp line between the sphere of science and that of religion; all of them, by their own admission, have ended by cleaving the world of our experience violently in twain. Other religions have sought an immutable sanction for the law of duty. But all of them have placed that sanction outside of the world of man and of human interests. All therefore have ended in weakening the sense of brotherhood between man and man, and in trampling upon all bonds save those which unite the individual to an imaginary God.

It is only the positive religion which satisfies at once the intellectual and the moral needs of man and, at the same time, reconciles them with each other. It alone can claim to have found truth; for it alone rejects all that is unprovable and builds solely upon demonstrated fact. It alone gives unity to our experience; for it alone excludes all contradictory assumptions, neither admitting into the world of nature the element of the supernatural nor drawing any difference of kind between the world of natural agents and that of man's moral and social activities. It alone gives an impregnable sanction to the moral law; for it alone places that sanction within the world of man; it alone therefore identifies the religious spirit absolutely with the love of man. Finally, it alone binds together the intellectual and the moral life of man; for it alone finds in the principle, which is the mainspring of our moral life, that which at the same time gives unity to our intellectual activities. In one word, the positive religion has banished 'the absolute' both from the intellectual and the moral life of man; and, by so doing, it has for the first time interpreted both of them on rational principles and reconciled each of them to the other.

Such is a rough statement of what seem to be the cardinal points both of Comte's social philosophy and of the religion which he seeks to found upon it. It remains to ask, What are the dominant

principles, implied as well as expressed in that philosophy; how far are they valid; what, in short, is the permanent contribution of Comte to political and religious thought?

The leading idea of Comte's political philosophy is undoubtedly the idea of humanity, the subordination of the individual to the community at large. Nothing could well be stronger than the persistence with which he assumes this as the starting-point at every stage of his enquiry. In so doing, he was doubtless, as has been said, treading in the steps of the great thinkers who, at once inspired by the French Revolution and reacting from it, had in the generation before him laid an entirely new foundation for political thought. That, however, is no slur on his originality. He was the first writer outside of Germany—and, of those who have had any popular following, the first writer in Europe—to work out organic principles in politics as a detailed and comprehensive whole; the first writer, that is, to gain a general hearing for such principles as are not based on the autonomy of the individual. And, what is yet more distinctive, he was the first to free those principles from the trammels of the purely speculative, if not abstract, form in which they were originally proclaimed.

That this is so could be shown in a variety of ways. It is enough to take two illustrations; one from the conclusions, the other from the methods of the *Politique Positive*. As to the former, the place which Comte assigns to the 'affective element,' or the emotions, both in his scheme of individual character and in his reconstruction of society, and the stress which he lays on the justice of the 'revolt of the heart against the intellect' are conclusive. Whatever the value of the distinction between heart and intellect—on that point it will be necessary to say something later—there can clearly be no meaning in it whatever, unless it is intended as a protest against the purely intellectual conception of human nature and social progress and as a demand for a more concrete ideal of both; for an ideal which shall more completely embrace all the elements both of human nature and human society than that either of the French Encyclopedists or of the German philosophers can reasonably claim to do. The protest may be couched in a blundering form; but, at bottom, it has a serious meaning and deserves serious consideration.

It is, however, not only in his conclusions but also in his methods that Comte strives after a more concrete conception of his subject than is perhaps to be found—certainly, than it is easy to recognise—in his German forerunners. Like them, he employs the historical method. Like them, he accepts the idea of progress. But in his hands the former becomes a very different weapon, the latter a very different conception, from what it was in theirs. The

method of Hegel is to fix his eye upon the intellectual beliefs of mankind, or rather upon the speculative systems of the most typical thinkers in the history of mankind; and to trace the stages by which each has been logically developed from that which went before and then, by an inevitable process, has destroyed itself to make room for that which followed. The method of Comte, on the other hand, is to dwell less upon the reasoned systems of individual thinkers than upon the instinctive tendencies of popular opinion and imaginative faith. It is not Plato and Aristotle, not the nominalists and realists, not Locke and Hume, not even Voltaire and Rousseau, that bulk most largely in his view; but rather the primitive superstition of the fetish-worshipper and astrologer, the popular mythology of polytheism, the unreasoning faith of medieval Christendom, the poetic fancies of Chivalry, the fiery passions of the Convention and the Reign of Terror. Much, doubtless, is lost by the greater laxity of treatment, but something also is gained. If there is less of logic, there is more of human nature in Comte's conception of history than in Hegel's. The results of Hegel are apt to recall the ghastly appearance of plants cut and dried in a botanist's herbarium; those of Comte have at least something of the vigorous life, the sap and verdure, of field and forest. His philosophy of history has grave defects, defects that will call for notice at a later stage of our enquiry. But those defects are to be found rather in his application of the method he uses than in the method itself. On the whole, his method is more human, and therefore more comprehensive, than that of Hegel. If we except Herder—and the exception is a doubtful one—he was the first thinker to draw primitive man into the charmed circle of the philosophy of history.

It is, then, in his inclusion of the emotional element of human nature, and in the change of method which that inclusion necessarily involved, that the lasting contribution of Comte to political theory must be sought. Further than that the advance made by him upon the results and methods of his predecessors can hardly be said to go. And, as often happens, that advance itself is largely due to the very qualities which, in other directions, made him a missionary of reaction. If he laid stress, and rightly laid stress, upon the part played by the emotions in the growth of individual character and of social life, that sprang at least as much from a negative as from a positive impulse. It was largely, if not wholly, due to the fatal flaw which vitiated his whole view both of the individual and of humanity: his incurable suspicion of human intellect and reason.

By that suspicion, traceable at moments even in his earlier work, the later work of Comte is fairly dominated. And this is the more strange because, as is well known, the foundation of his

system was laid in a wide and critical study of the natural sciences. Nor did he ever cease to insist that the corner stone of positivism—the seal, so to speak, of its authenticity—is its conformity to the facts of our experience, in other words its demonstrable truth; a truth to the results of natural science on the one hand, a truth to the permanent needs and instincts of human nature, themselves largely determined by the laws revealed in science, on the other.

This discrepancy has led to a fervid controversy among the disciples of Comte as to the legitimacy of the later developments of their master's teaching. The question is not one that lends itself to a definite settlement, nor perhaps is it of great importance. The really important thing to determine is not whether Comte was from beginning to end a consistent writer; but how far does his later work depart from the 'positive' method and from 'positive' results, as commonly understood; how far such a departure, if it can be proved to exist, is foreshadowed in his earlier writings; and, above all, how far either the positive doctrine or Comte's alleged deviation from it is consistent or inconsistent with the truth.

What the world in general, as distinguished from the professed disciples of Comte, understands by the positive method is roughly this. The positive method rejects all *a priori* arguments; it rejects all abstract ideas; it rejects all absolute standards. It is inductive, concrete and relative. The mark of the positive thinker is to apply the methods and, so far as may be, the results of natural science to the investigation of the higher problems presented by the individual and political life of man. It is to build his conclusions upon the accumulated experience of the past, as modified by observation of the changing circumstances of the present.

Now it is manifest that this view embodies two quite distinct propositions. The first is that the methods—the second, that the results—of science can properly be applied to political philosophy. The latter doctrine will most conveniently be taken first.

It is a doctrine which has found much popular acceptance and which, for that reason, deserves careful attention. That there is a close connection between the moral and the physical nature of man, and consequently that biology may throw some light on moral and political enquiry, no one would now dream of denying. The moral capacities of man are largely determined by his physical organism, as that in turn is largely determined by climate, soil, planetary conditions and other influences of a purely physical kind. At the same time, it is fairly certain that the practical importance of this principle has been greatly overrated. It is valuable in fixing the broad lines of political enquiry; it gives little help in ascertaining the details. It tells us little that we did not know before it was formulated in long-sounding words and proclaimed as a discovery



of the first importance. It belongs, in fact, rather to the region of common sense than of science. It belongs to the region of political philosophy still more than to that of common sense.

And the reason is plain. Whatever influence the physical organism of man may have upon his moral nature must reveal itself, first and foremost, in the latter. For the purposes of the statesman or political philosopher it is the facts of man's moral life, and not their physical causes or conditions, that are important. A knowledge of such causes may indeed serve to check, to illustrate, or even within certain limits to interpret, our observation of the facts. But more than this it cannot pretend to do. The physical cause must show itself in its social effects; or, for the social philosopher, it is nothing.

For these reasons it would seem that the limits, within which the results of science are available for social enquiry, are extremely narrow; and that, so far as Comte held a contrary opinion, the foundation on which he built was unstable. And it would be easy to illustrate this both from his own precept and his own example.<sup>1</sup> That, however, is no argument for saying that the methods, as opposed to the results, of science are not to be applied to social philosophy. The two questions are quite distinct, and each of them must be tried on its own merits.

To the positive thinker, as we have seen, the methods of natural science are also the methods of political philosophy. Those methods, as generally accepted and as defined by Comte himself, are reducible to three: observation, comparison and experiment. Now, of these, experiment in the strict sense—the sense in which it is applied to the study of physics or chemistry—is excluded from political enquiry. For the power of isolating each individual process of enquiry, which is the essence of such experiment, is here manifestly unknown. It is idle to say, as Comte does, that though unable to institute artificial experiments in sociology, we are provided with their natural equivalent as often as experience brings to our notice any departure from the normal train of social

<sup>1</sup> As to precept, Comte himself repeatedly, and justly, insists that the influence of soil and climate on the political and moral life of man has been greatly exaggerated. So: 'Montesquieu a beaucoup exagéré, sous plusieurs rapports, l'influence des climats' (*Pol. Pos.* iv., Appendix, p. 107 (written in 1822)). Compare *Phil. Pos.* (Martineau, ii. 198-201), *Pol. Pos.* ii. 450, and other places. As to example, almost the only point in which Comte comes to close quarters with his own theory is his attempt to justify his psychology, his hierarchy of the mental and moral faculties of man, by an appeal to phrenology. See *Pol. Pos.* i. 669-736, with the Table to which it refers. This attempt is now, I believe, commonly admitted to have entirely broken down.

events. This is the equivalent not of the experiments of natural science, but of the observation which they are intended to test.

The man of science, directly he observes a fact which conflicts or seems to conflict with his previous experience, proceeds to sift it by experiment. The observation is not identical with the experiment, but precedes it and leads up to it. It is the earlier stage in a twofold process, of which experiment is the final and the crucial stage. Now, it is just this final and crucial stage which, by Comte's own admission, is wanting to the processes of political investigation. And it is wanting because—in the matter of political, as in the matter of pathological, investigation—it is not possible to isolate either the conditions from which the supposed new consequence is to flow, or the consequence which the given hypothesis requires them to yield. For this reason, experiment in the strict sense—the sense in which alone, to adopt Comte's language, it has 'scientific value'—is for ever excluded from political enquiry.

There is doubtless a laxer sense in which we use the term 'experiment,' and in which we apply it to the processes of botany and zoology. Grafting is an instance of experiment in this sense as applied to botany; and the crossing of breeds, whether by artifice or spontaneously, as applied to zoology. The question therefore arises whether, in this laxer sense, experiment finds a place in sociology. It may fairly be argued that it does. But it must be admitted that in sociology the conditions from which enquiry starts are far more complex than in biology. It is difficult—it may often be impossible—to ascertain what conditions are present, and what are not present, when the disturbing element is introduced. It is still more difficult to ascertain the relative strength of each condition. And the consequence is that the real nature of the causes determining the result, and still more the part that each has played in producing it, may, when all is said and done, baffle detection. It follows that, even in the looser sense, experiment, though not impossible, is of little practical service to political enquiry.

Experiment then being barred out, or reduced within the narrowest limits, observation and comparison remain as the only methods of science available in political philosophy. Now, observation and comparison of political facts are, in some sense, as old as the world. The conspirators who overthrew the false Smerdis had observed facts; they had also compared them. And, if we may believe Herodotus,<sup>1</sup> they had done so with great astuteness. Nor were they by any means the inventors of the method. There is no society that is not, in some measure, founded upon it;

[<sup>1</sup> *History*, Book III.]

there is no ruler who has not at some time acted on its strength. To say, therefore, that observation and comparison are new things in political enquiry—that their application dates from the triumph of the 'positive' spirit—is, to say the least, misleading. What is true is that, having in former times been applied in an extremely loose and haphazard manner, they are now employed more rigorously, more systematically, and in a more scientific spirit.

Observation and comparison, then, have beyond question won both a wider and a deeper hold over political philosophy than any man would have dared to hope a century ago. Beyond question also they are instruments employed by the inductive sciences. And this brings us back to the 'positive' doctrine that the instruments of science are also the instruments, as the results of science are in large measure the starting-point, of political philosophy. How far—we are now in a position to ask—does this doctrine represent a substantial truth? On the whole, it would appear that more has been claimed for science in this matter than, on examination, can be made good. Much has been claimed for the results of science, in application to political philosophy; more yet for her methods. In fact, however, the results of science offer but little help in this region; and what they do offer is not primary but secondary, not immediate but derived. The workings of man's physical organism and physical surroundings must show themselves on his character, or rather on his social activities, before they can affect the conclusions of the political philosopher.

So also with regard to method. Experiment, of all inductive methods the surest and most distinctive, is, even in its laxer sense, of little service to political enquiry; and, in the stricter sense, it is absolutely unknown. We are left only with observation and comparison; and it would not be hard to show that these are not the peculiar property of science, but are common, pure mathematics alone excepted, to all branches of human knowledge.

More than this. Large as is the part these methods have come to play in political enquiry, they are not by any means the only methods of which that enquiry makes use. There is analysis, and there is deduction. It may be argued that both analysis and deduction are indispensable also to the inductive sciences. And it is profoundly true. But it is also true that they are yet more indispensable to political philosophy. For, just in proportion as the methods distinctive of the inductive sciences count here for less, so the methods peculiar to the deductive sciences and to metaphysics count for more, than they do in chemistry or in physics.

There are, in truth, two reasons, closely connected, which make it impossible that political philosophy should ever be a purely inductive science. Induction is limited to facts; political

philosophy has to deal not only with facts but with ideas. Consciously or unconsciously, men have always acted under the influence of certain speculative beliefs; and no explanation of the facts can be complete if it does not take account of the ideas from which in great measure they have sprung. This at once brings the enquirer into the region of deduction and, what is yet more important, of speculative methods and ideas.

Again, once grant that society is not a mere aggregate of individuals, that it is something other and higher than the individuals of which it is composed, and it follows that the inductive method, which essentially depends upon the isolation of individual cases and the resolution of these into their elements, cannot be the only, nor even the chief, method of political philosophy. The very postulate of physical life is enough to baffle the inductive weapons of the biologist. It introduces an unknown quantity which no analysis has yet been able to resolve. And the postulate of corporate life fixes a wider gulf between sociology and biology than that of physical life fixes between biology and inorganic chemistry. The idea of duty, which is involved in that of corporate life, widens the gulf still further. To estimate the full bearing of such conceptions, it is not the methods of inductive science, observation and comparison, but the methods of speculative philosophy, the power of tracing consequences, the genius for deduction, that are required.

On both hands, therefore, the attempt to bring 'sociology' completely into line with the inductive sciences must be held to have broken down. It does not employ all the methods, nor even the most distinctive methods, of inductive science; and it does employ methods which, though known to what we call inductive science, are themselves certainly the reverse of inductive.

Yet in spite of these limitations—limitations admitted, it must be remembered in no small measure by Comte himself—it remains true that inductive science, itself deepened and strengthened in its methods by the revival of the last hundred years, has in its turn deepened and strengthened the methods of political philosophy; that political thinkers both observe more widely and draw their inferences more cautiously; and that political study has come to be more inductive, more concrete and more relative—in one word, more 'positive'—now than it was a century, or even half a century, ago. It is a revolution; and a revolution beyond question largely due to the influence of Comte.

But the more heartily we welcome this revolution, the more we are bound to recognise all the consequences it involves. And that is just what Comte, in his later work, cannot in any sense be said to do.

It is clear that, if the methods of science—if observation and comparison—are to do their work, they must be allowed an absolutely free hand. All facts must be thrown open to their scrutiny. No fact, no class of facts, must be barred out on the plea that it is irrelevant or barren. This is true of any conceivable method that can be applied to the enlargement or the testing of human knowledge. But of no method is it true in so obvious and glaring a manner as of that which is pre-eminently the method of inductive science. And the larger the share that we give to the methods of inductive science in political philosophy, the more deeply would one expect the need of absolute freedom to be felt. If the history of science during the last century has taught anything, it is that there is no fact which the enquirer can afford to throw aside, no class of facts that he can afford to treat as forbidden ground.

This is a principle which lies at the foundation of modern thought. It is a principle to which Comte, at any rate in his later writings, gives no quarter. In his earlier work the inquisitorial spirit, the tendency to put shackles on free enquiry, is, by comparison, but slightly marked. It might almost escape the notice of a hasty reader. It might seem to go but little beyond that vague hatred of metaphysics which Comte shares with more than one notable man of science. In fact, however, there are from the very first ominous signs of the distrust of reason by which his whole view was ultimately distorted. Again and again he denounces the barrenness of modern science, the aimless licence of its students and their love of unmeaning detail. Again and again he insists that the duty of the 'positive' thinker is not merely to co-ordinate existing knowledge, but to cut off its excrescences. It is not because he denies the necessity of such pruning in his earlier work, but because he carries it so much farther in his later, that the one leaves an impression so different from that which is given by the other. The question as to the exact degree of difference is of little moment. It is more important to ask what is the ground for the charges which Comte brings against the accepted methods of enquiry, and what is to be thought of his remedies.

It would be idle to deny that there is some justice in Comte's complaints as to the barrenness of what sometimes passes for scientific or historical research. Some of the results, which it has cost infinite labour to reach, belong doubtless purely to the region of erudition. And, so long as they remain in that region, they may fairly be said to have no wide bearing and no 'present value.' The question, however, at once arises, What is the cause of this barrenness? Is it due to the choice of subject, or to the spirit in which the subject is pursued? In the former case, Comte's remedy is, no doubt, the only possible one. But it is a remedy so desperate

as to be worse than the disease. Before accepting the one, we may fairly ask whether the physician is right as to the other.

It is, in itself, far more likely that the defects of our knowledge should be due rather to the spirit in which we handle it than to the matter of which it is composed. And in this case what is intrinsically likely is confirmed by a consideration of the facts. In all research there are, or ought to be, two processes; processes which may, in practice, be inseparably intertwined but which, in theory, it is always possible, and even necessary, to hold apart. There is, on the one hand, the task of ascertaining the fact. There is, on the other hand, the task of establishing its connection with other facts and, by that means, of arriving at some more or less general principle. The two processes are equally necessary; the one may be regarded as the means, the other as the end, which is to be attained by that means or not at all.

Now it is a tendency of some minds—and never, perhaps, more than at the present day—to stop short with the former process and to disparage the latter; to exalt the former as the only legitimate function of research and to condemn the latter as unnecessary and unscientific. Not that it is possible to confine research absolutely to the observation of fact. The greatest fanatic could not do so, even if he would. No ingenuity can literally isolate one fact from all the rest. To observe the fact is, and must always be, to establish its connection with other facts either previously known or now for the first time attentively considered. Still, this side of research can, no doubt, be reduced within comparatively narrow limits. The connection, the general principle, established may be less general as well as more. And the less general, the less far-reaching it is, the better a somewhat perverse type of mind is likely to be pleased.

This is the true cause of the barrenness which has, to some extent, fallen on our knowledge; this, and not a taint inherent in certain regions that men have striven to explore. And the true remedy for this barrenness, so far as it exists, is not to bar out any one kind of enquiry, but to foster the wider, the more fruitful, of the two elements which must meet in all kinds; in the conviction that, by so doing, we can give dignity to any subject, however irksome, and draw fruit from any field of knowledge, however limited and however remote. The true hope for the 'advancement of learning' is not to lop off certain branches of it, but to pour fresh life through the whole of it, by quickening that sap and vital principle of it which Comte himself has fitly called the 'connecting spirit,' *l'esprit d'ensemble*.

And this brings us to the one vital difference that is to be found between Comte's earlier and his later work. In both he denounces

the evils which flow from the love of detail and the constant increase of specialisation in modern thought. But in the former his general tendency is to accept the action of the 'connecting spirit' as a sufficient remedy. In the latter he inclines more and more to rule out whole provinces of enquiry, and to justify himself by a rigid theory as to the necessary limitations of human knowledge. This is the distinctive mark of the *Politique Positive*. And it is due not, as has sometimes been said, to any motiveless perversity, but to the gradual development—in one sense we may fairly say the gradual deepening—of his speculative ideas.

In his earlier work he had taken the results and methods of natural science pretty much for granted. All he had done was to analyse them, to connect them and to generalise from them. He had never stopped to enquire into their speculative foundation. He had never paused to frame for himself any theory of human knowledge, nor to ask what are the speculative ideas that it presupposes. So far as he had any theory on the matter, it was, in all probability, the theory of Locke, or that theory as modified, and indeed transformed, by the speculative genius of Hume. The grounds for drawing this inference are not indeed very certain. They are, in the first place, the obvious derivation of his later doctrine—a derivation indicated by Comte himself in the *Catéchisme Positive*<sup>1</sup>—from the theories of Hume; and, in the second place, the marked respect with which, even in his earlier work,<sup>2</sup> he goes out of his way to speak of Hume and, in particular, of Hume's theory about causation. The question, however, is of little practical importance. For it is only too evident that, at this time, he had given no serious thought to the matter whatsoever.

For his own peace of mind perhaps it was well that he had not. Had he done so, he could hardly have gone on his way as lightly as he did. He would have seen that he was not entitled to speak at once with so much certainty of the discoveries of science, and with so much contempt of the assumptions which alone can justify that certainty, as appears in every one of his earlier writings. He would have been compelled to take his choice between the one and the other. He would have been forced to make his argument either more consistently sceptical, or less aggressively hostile to metaphysics, than it actually was. The former, it need hardly be said, would have been the more likely of the two alternatives.

The strait in which he was placed can be made clear in a few sentences. The argument of Locke—and it was this that formed the starting-point of the school from which he sprang and from which, to all appearance, he never consciously dissevered himself—

[<sup>1</sup> Preface, p. 8.]

[<sup>2</sup> *Philosophie Positive*, vi. p. 259. He refers to 'le judicieux Hume.']

had practically gone to the denial of all knowledge not given primarily in sensation. And Hume, who is formally acknowledged by Comte as the earliest forerunner of distinctly 'positive' teaching, had explicitly drawn the consequences which Locke himself was not clear-sighted enough to detect. It is true, he had urged, that sensation is the only source of certainty and therefore the only source of what is strictly to be called knowledge. But it is true, at the same time, that the greater part of what man takes for knowledge is not, and never can be, drawn from sensation. It is merely the instinctive assumption of an understanding which acts, and cannot but act, under the sway of a blind and inexplicable association. To this blind association of ideas is due our conception of cause, substance, object—of all, in short, that gives us the world of which common sense, no less than science, discourses, and gives it to us as a connected whole and as governed by unchanging and intelligible laws. Thus, in denying the constructive faculty to reason, Hume was forced to deny also the reality of knowledge. In reducing all knowledge to association, he reduced it also to a purely subjective illusion.

It was on the sandy foundation of this theory—or rather, of the less logical and explicit form of it set forth by Locke—that the great achievements of science in the generation preceding Comte, were professedly carried out. Nor, in his earlier work, is there any indication that Comte himself was seriously disposed to question its soundness. A suspicion he may have had that, if the mind of man were really of such a nature as Locke implied and Hume explicitly declared, it could not possibly be able to apprehend a world of objective laws. But the suspicion, if it arose, was speedily suppressed. It was not until he came to write the *Politique Positive* that he set himself in earnest to test the philosophical basis of his scientific faith. In the interval, to all appearance, he had learnt something, vaguely and by hearsay, of the doctrines of Kant; and what he made of them, how utterly he failed to understand their bearing, we shall shortly see. Perhaps all that he really gained from them was that he was put on sifting the conceptions which hitherto he had taken for granted. In his earlier work, no criticism of the manner in which knowledge is obtained was allowed to interfere with his acceptance of the results which it has achieved. The *Philosophie Positive* is remarkable for its total abstinence from philosophy.

In this neglect of fundamental questions, as well as in the inconsistencies which naturally flowed from it, Comte was at one with the men of science who, like him, built ultimately upon the theories of Locke and his disciples. In one point of the first importance he even carried the inconsistency a step further. Their view, from



the nature of the case, had been confined to the intellectual side of man's energy. Comte, as he was never weary of insisting, had from the first fixed his eye no less closely upon moral and social problems. They, therefore, had limited the creative faculty, the power of conceiving and realising not merely detached objects but a world of objects as a whole, to the intellectual side of man's nature; and they had done so only by implication, without any explicit acknowledgement, apparently without any clear consciousness, of what they were about. Comte, on the other hand, extended the creative faculty to the moral energies of man; what is more, he did so explicitly, and with the clearest consciousness that, in so doing, he was making a breach with the traditions of the school from which he sprang. He rejected the mechanical explanation of moral action, the reduction of all motives to the instinct of self-gratification or of pleasure, which had been offered by Hume and his disciples; he put the idea of duty in the forefront of his moral and social system; and he denied not only the rights of the individual, but the very reality of his being. 'L'ensemble seul est réel'—the community alone is real, the individual is nothing—that was the cardinal doctrine of his social theory. That, from the first, was the most potent, as well as the most distinctive, element of his creed.

Such a conviction, once laid at the base of Comte's theory of action, could not fail also to influence his treatment of purely intellectual questions. For 'the community' substitute 'the universal' or 'the general law,' and we have the counterpart, in the intellectual region, of what we have already seen to be Comte's cardinal principle in the sphere of action. 'The universal, the general law, alone is real; the particular, the isolated detail, is nothing'—this is as much the text of the first half of the *Philosophie Positive*, that which deals with the codification of the sciences, as the corresponding social maxim is of the second, that which deals with the principles and direction of human conduct. And here too, though to a less degree, Comte intensifies the difficulties which he inherited from the men of science. The theory of Locke or Hume may be inadequate to account even for one isolated object; Kant demonstrated that it was so. But it is ten times more inadequate to account for a world of related objects, a world in which the particular is dismissed as worthless and the general law is declared to be alone of value. The more Comte insists—as he did with justice—upon the necessity of the universal, the less possible was it for him to remain faithful to a theory which either explains away the universal or pronounces it to be a fiction.

Thus both on intellectual and, still more, on moral grounds it is clear that Comte was forced to reconsider his original position. His task was to retain a world of objective laws, to retain the

conception of the community and the idea of duty, and at the same time to exclude the existence of any reason higher than man's, of any element in man which may enable him to overstep the limits of purely human interests and perceptions and to realise, however dimly, an order of things determined not by man's nature but by its own. It was to find a basis for the universal element which he saw to be essential both to human conduct and to scientific investigation; and to do so without recognising that absolute principle which, rightly or wrongly, he held to be the source of all moral mischief and all intellectual confusion. The task was one which might well have daunted a less resolute heart than his. One can only wonder at the skill and boldness with which he set himself to its performance. The key to all difficulties he discovered in the agnostic creed; a creed of which, it is only fair to remember, he was the founder and the first missionary.

The discovery bid fair to make his fortune. It seemed to answer all the ends which it was intended to meet. At a single stroke it barred out the absolute principle. To one who holds the agnostic faith, it is a cardinal axiom that all truth is relative; that the final and absolute truth is not, and never can be, known to man. Man—in Comte's view, not the individual but the race—becomes at once the centre of all knowledge and the end of all action. For any further warrant of knowledge, for any higher sanction of action, than is to be found in his own needs and his own well-being it is useless for him to enquire. And if useless, it is also arrogant and ridiculous. In himself he finds all that is necessary to satisfy the rational demands of his intellect; in himself he finds all that is required for the attainment of that moral ideal which the best men have always sought, but sought commonly by mistaken means and therefore with inadequate, and not seldom disastrous, results.

Thus, on the one hand, the agnostic theory finally banished the absolute principle both from human knowledge and from human conduct. On the other hand, it claimed to leave the universal principle in both untouched. As handled by Comte, at any rate, it admitted a world of law which, just because it is avowedly beyond man's comprehension, can never be reduced—as Comte considered the 'German pantheists' to have reduced it—to an illusive reflection of his own lawless reason or caprice. So also in the field of conduct. It insisted on the nothingness of the individual; and, by sweeping away the false belief in a duty towards God, it for the first time set man's duty toward man upon an impregnable foundation and established, as no creed which looks for the ultimate sanction of all action to the will of God can possibly establish, the unquestioned supremacy of the community, or rather of mankind.

Such were the advantages that Comte drew from the new form

given to his theory in the *Politique Positive*. It remains to ask, how far that theory is consistent with its own presuppositions, and how far they in turn are consistent with the facts.

The knot of the difficulty is clearly to be found in the following questions: Can it be said that such a theory leaves any ground for that objective certainty which is necessary to the existence of scientific laws, that certainty which Comte himself had assumed throughout his earlier treatise and which in the *Politique Positive* he repeatedly reasserts? And again: How can man, if indeed his mind works under the shackles supposed in the *Politique Positive*, either conceive an idea so remote from sensible experience as that of the community and, still more, of mankind? Or, having conceived it, how can he further conceive of himself as under an obligation to treat that idea as an ideal, to make it the end and arbiter of all his motives and his acts? Neither on the intellectual nor on the moral side could Comte assume that he had strengthened his theory by the mere process of deepening its foundations.

We begin with the intellectual side. The theory of Comte, as we have seen, is bound up with a wholesale proscription of certain kinds of investigation. Now it must be said at once that the breaches which he thus makes in the fabric of existing knowledge undermine the foundation of all that he is willing to leave. In order to justify this statement, we ask: What are the branches of knowledge that he proscribes, and what is the bearing of that proscription upon the validity of what he suffers to escape?

In the first place, he draws a sharp distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' science; the former, according to his definition, dealing with 'events,' the latter with 'existence'; the former comprising astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology; the latter such subjects as meteorology, mineralogy, geology and natural history, together with the concrete part of the study of mankind, or what is sometimes called anthropology. It is the former subjects alone, he decides, that are worthy of study. The latter, important as they might be if accessible to man, are in fact beyond his grasp. All that he can do is to follow them empirically, just in so far as they are needed for the purposes of trade or the practical concerns of life, but no further. They are the sphere of the mariner, the engineer and the veterinary surgeon; not of the man of science. This, then, is the first embargo laid by Comte upon the claims of human knowledge. The whole field of 'concrete science' is struck off without more ado.

His success here encourages him to further efforts. And next comes the turn of abstract science. The endless specialisation of knowledge, Comte urges, is frivolous and barren; and we are bound to discourage it by all means in our power. It is absolutely

necessary that man should have some principle to guide his knowledge. In former times such a principle was found in religion, in that search for the 'glory of God,' which Bacon held to be one of the two ends of all human enquiry. God having gone, that end must of necessity go with Him. To say, as the 'metaphysicians' did, that knowledge is an end in itself is to say that it has no end, no principle, at all. The only alternative left is to limit ourselves to the second end recognised by Bacon, to make the advantage of mankind the sole aim of our search, to banish all knowledge which is not directed to the 'relief of man's estate.'

This principle is startling in itself; it is still more startling in its practical application.<sup>1</sup> Astronomy is reduced to the study of the solar system, or rather the fragment of that system which has been known to man from time immemorial and which alone has bearing upon his daily needs. The bulk of Algebra is struck out of mathematics. Organic chemistry is swept away as an independent science, and becomes the humble handmaid of biology. Further raids are made into the dominion of science; but it is needless to specify them. The general drift of Comte's purging of the sciences is already sufficiently plain. And, if more be wanted, it is best given in the words of Comte himself: 'This salutary rigour will doubtless put an end to the greater part of existing speculations, and will reform almost all the rest.'

The same 'rigour' is applied still more relentlessly to the higher and less exact branches of study. History, except in so far as it supplies material for the Comtist structure—it would hardly be too much to say, confirmation for the Comtist conclusions—is virtually abolished. Poetry and the fine arts become little more than an appendage to the positivist worship. Metaphysics is dismissed as a childish and 'insolent' delusion. Moral Philosophy hardly earns even the compliment of a contemptuous mention.

So much for the results of Comte's assault upon the freedom of enquiry. We now turn to its bearing upon the general principles of knowledge. If Comte's proscription of these things has any meaning, it is that each branch of knowledge is independent of the rest; that each finds in itself its own justification and completion; that each is to be accepted or rejected on its own merits, without regard to the bearing it may have on others, or others upon it. Now it is not too much to say that such a belief is fatal not only to all hope of future progress in knowledge, but to the very certainty of that which we already possess.

We take the former point first. The various branches of knowledge are not separate from each other. 'They all belong to

[<sup>1</sup> See especially 'Introduction Fondamentale,' chap. ii. (*Politique Positive*, i.).]

a common stock; they all spring from a common root. Exclude one science, and it is certain that, sooner or later, the progress of other sciences will be checked. This may happen in two ways, corresponding to the two methods by which knowledge is commonly advanced. Often, perhaps most commonly, advance has come from the side of the special sciences. Some fact, hitherto overlooked, has been rigorously sifted; a connection, hitherto unsuspected, between it and other facts within the limits of the same science has been established; a new law, perhaps changing the face of the whole science, has been proclaimed. Nor does the process necessarily stop there. There are discoveries—from the nature of the case they cannot occur often—which have affected the principles of more sciences than one; discoveries, such as was that of gravitation, which have ultimately changed man's view of nature, and even of God, in the most vital manner. In the face of these facts, by what right, we ask, does Comte lay down a doctrine which discourages the study of facts not hitherto formulated, and which, whatever its profession, assumes that each science is independent of the rest?

Sometimes, again, the way of progress has been reversed. It has started not from a special science, but from some perfectly general idea. Its direction has not been upwards but downwards; not from the particular to the general, but from the general to the particular. And here the unity of knowledge is shown perhaps still more obviously than in the former case. Who can estimate, for example, the influence that the idea of evolution—an idea, in the first instance, of purely general scope—has had upon the special sciences of biology, of history and of philosophy? Who, to take a yet more crucial instance, can estimate the influence by which Christianity, starting from the relation of man to God, has gradually remoulded man's conception of his relation to other men and to nature? That influence, as regards our conception of nature, may not always have been for good. But no one will deny that it has been far-reaching; and few will dispute that, on the whole, it has been fruitful. It is true that neither Christianity nor evolution, as applied to the study of animal physiology, meets with much favour at the hands of Comte. But no doctrine which condemns—as Comte's doctrine does condemn—the methods by which they, to say nothing of ideas more distinctly metaphysical, have shaped the thoughts of men can have any serious claim upon our acceptance.

Thus each part of knowledge depends upon the others, and all parts are open to receive fresh light from the whole. It follows that, the more we desire—as Comte professes to desire—to harmonise our knowledge—the more keenly we feel the necessity

of winnowing out its most fundamental and vital principles—the more we are bound to extend, by all means in our power, the study of its details; the less we are entitled to reject any detail, however unpromising, as insignificant; or to discourage the investigation of any subject, however remote from our immediate interests, as frivolous or irrelevant. It follows also, if possible with still more clearness, that the very last way to foster the connecting spirit—if that indeed were Comte's intention—is to wage war upon those ideas, religious or metaphysical, which have done more to establish a connection between the diverse branches of human knowledge than any other.

The truth is, however, that, like other fanatics, Comte was much more concerned to secure the immediate triumph of his own particular fragment of the truth than to open a free path for the advance of truth, in and for itself. It seems to have been his fixed belief that the world for all time would subsist upon that smattering of general knowledge which is embodied in the *Philosophie Positive*. In the narrow path which Comte had there marked out for the faithful the world was to move, or not to move at all. If a man desired to go more closely into detail, he was branded as a slavish spirit, a man, by his own confession, not 'up to the level' of his age. If, on the other hand, he was prompted to ask questions which Comte had thrust aside on the plea that they were either unanswerable or unpractical, he was flouted as a metaphysician, or a charlatan, or any other of the hard words familiar to the elephantine vocabulary of the High Priest of Humanity. Exactly as much detail, exactly as much generality, as Comte vouchsafed to his disciples—no more and no less—that is the Catholic standard, to be accepted always, everywhere, and by all.

It is a hard saying. And an assumption, still more intolerable, lies behind it. This is the assumption—one supported by no evidence and contradicted by all experience—that the knowledge man has hitherto attained is, within its own limits, accurate and complete and that no search beyond those limits would have the power to modify it in any serious particular. This is an opinion which has been held by the foolish at every age of the world's history; and each succeeding age has demonstrated its futility. It was reserved for Comte to make it the basis of a theory of knowledge and a system of politics.

But the theory of Comte not only debars us from possible additions to our knowledge. It also, in the very act of doing so, undermines the certainty—and that means, in the last resort, the objective reality—of what we have already gained. This follows inevitably from what has already been said about the nature of

knowledge. The world of knowledge is not the result of a mere gradual accretion; it is a vital and organic whole. The only warrant for certainty in any part of it is that a constant current of free enquiry shall be kept flowing from one end of it to the other. That is the leaven which leavens the whole lump, the breath which gives life to the whole body. Now the freedom of knowledge is avowedly sacrificed by Comte; and, with its freedom, its unity, as an immanent and vital principle, is also explicitly denied. Can it be said that anything serviceable, or even intelligible, is offered to us in exchange?

In rejecting the unity of knowledge, as a principle inherent in its very nature, it must not be forgotten that Comte endeavours to maintain an unity of his own. That unity, as has already been said, he finds not in any principle belonging to knowledge, or to the world revealed by knowledge, in its own right, but in one imposed upon them from without; that is, in the practical needs and advantage of mankind. To prove that this is the true foundation, and the only solid one, for the unity of our knowledge, and to revise the current conceptions of knowledge in accordance with it, is one of the main objects of the *Politique Positive*. Can such a principle be made to serve Comte's purpose in any measure? If he does not allow freedom to knowledge, if he surrenders its inherent and vital unity, does he at least secure its certainty and its objective reality?

His answers to these questions betray an incurable hesitation. At one moment he insists upon the unassailable certainty of physical laws and the indispensable necessity of their study to mankind. At another moment he uses arguments which imply—even where they do not assert in so many words—that no absolute certainty is attainable by man and that, for practical purposes, this disability is of little moment. The only inference to draw from this vacillation is that he had never made up his mind concerning the most fundamental principles of human knowledge; and, consequently, that to spend time on sifting his discordant statements is no better than lost labour. It is more profitable to leave so barren a task on one side and to content ourselves with asking what are the alternatives which lie before the man who seeks to discover a principle of unity and, if possible, a principle of certainty in human knowledge.

Such a principle may be found, firstly, in the world regarded as something given from without. The world is one; and the mind, which is nothing more than a mirror reflecting the world according to its power, gathers the scattered fragments of that reflection into an image which is also one. This is the explanation offered by the materialist philosophy, the explanation which suggests itself to the unreflecting instincts of common sense. It is an explanation,

however, which is not only overthrown by the unanswered arguments of Hume and of those thinkers—Kant, first and foremost—who took up the problem at the point where Hume suffered it to drop; but it is explicitly rejected by Comte himself in a large number of passages, particularly in his later works. It is true that other passages may be quoted to a directly opposite effect. That being so, his opinions may best be left to destroy each other at leisure.

The materialist interpretation being surrendered, the unity, which has vainly been sought in a world given from without, is to be found only in the reason through which the world of knowledge is gradually built up from within. And, if that world is to have not only unity but reality, we are forced to assume that, behind the material forces of which alone we have direct knowledge in the world without, there lies a spiritual principle akin to that of which we are conscious in our own nature but differing from it in that, while the one is finite and dependent, the other is infinite, self-centred and self-determined.

According to this interpretation, the knowledge of man is not a knowledge of detached objects which exist apart from the mind, but is of a piece with the mind, the reason of man, by which it has slowly been put together. And in that case, as Hegel pointed out, the mind is not free—it would be more true to say, it has not the power—to blot out any of the stages through which it has passed, or is passing, in the gradual unfolding of its own powers or, what comes to the same thing, in its gradual advance from less to more fullness and consistency of knowledge. The attempt to do so would only be justified, or indeed possible, if the instrument of knowledge were something separable from the knowledge which it shapes; whereas, *ex hypothesi*, the two are of inseparable growth, each in turn shaping the other and shaped by it. The mind, on this view of things, cannot turn round upon itself, it cannot annihilate the processes by which it has come to be what it is, any more than, on the ordinary hypothesis of diversity between itself and its object, it can shake itself free from organic ideas such as that of cause and effect or question the logical process of the syllogism. Much less can it reject whole tracts and provinces of knowledge, as Comte with a light heart insists that it must do.

And here speculation is at one with common sense and with the healthy instinct of mankind. All men, until they have been maddened by misuse, distrust the reformer who calls on them to break entirely with the past, or to trample under foot that which time has shown cause for reckoning an universal tendency of man's nature. And Hegel does no more than give the speculative ground for an opinion which all men naturally hold. Knowledge is not, any more than action, to be tied and bound by arbitrary



regulations. And the attempt which Comte makes to impose these is as contrary to common sense as it is to the most elementary principles of philosophy.

Thus the unity of knowledge, regarded as the sum and content of the several sciences, is the direct consequence of the unity of the reason from which it springs. The two, in fact, are but different sides of the same energy. When gathered into itself, that energy is what we mean by reason. When projected outwards and crystallised as a world of distinct sciences, each dealing with its own group of objects, we call it knowledge. And the latter, no less than the former, is one and indivisible. Hence it is—to take one consequence out of many—that, as man's general view of the world changes, so his conception of the commonest objects changes in response. As Comte himself would have admitted, no man more readily, the simplest object in nature, merely as an object, is a very different thing to the fetish-worshipper from what it is to the man who has been brought up, more or less completely, under the sway of 'positive' ideas. But, ready as he is to make the admission, he fails to draw its inevitable consequence. He proclaims the unity of knowledge in the abstract. His error lies in the inability to see that, by the wholesale breaches which he makes in the fabric of knowledge as it has historically been handed down to us, that unity is effectively destroyed.

And this points to a radical unsoundness in his conception of the conditions under which unity is to be secured; an unsoundness which taints both the form and the substance of his ideas. As regards form, the unity with which he is content comes to be more and more a purely artificial and mechanical unity. It is constituted by the mere addition or subtraction—most commonly, the mere subtraction—of items. It takes no account of that vital connection which is essential to any unity worthy of the name. Hence not only the ruthless excisions which he makes in the lists of the special sciences, but the arbitrary manner in which he accepts or rejects facts for investigation in those sciences which he suffers to remain. According to his method, there is no organic relation between the details of a given science and the general laws which he professes to draw from them; just as, in another sphere, there is no organic relation between the individuals of his ideal polity and the government of which they are virtually the slaves. Just as individuality, the healthy play of individual interests and individual passions, is left out of his scheme of politics, so the detail is virtually left out of his method of intellectual enquiry. Any generalisation, he seems to think, is good enough so long as it falls into line with the preconceived articles of the positivist faith. No sooner is it reached than the details on which it is, or professes to

be, founded are cast away as of no further value; and the rest are never taken into account at all. All men, doubtless, are more or less liable to this worship of the idols of the theatre and the cave. But no thinker, of anything like his importance, is tainted by it so widely or so deeply as Comte.

As regards substance, his conception of unity is no less deficient. He seeks the unity of man's knowledge neither in the world without, nor in the reason as a creative force within; neither in the self-sufficiency of matter, nor in the higher and purer self-sufficiency of spirit; but in terms arbitrarily dictated by the practical convenience of mankind. Either of the methods rejected by him would, if rightly handled, have yielded an objective standard. That which he accepts is, as he frankly confesses, nothing more than subjective. It carries with it the abandonment of any attempt to discover the intrinsic truth of things. It makes man—not the reason of man, but the practical needs of his fleeting and limited existence—the measure of all knowledge and of all enquiry. It deliberately sacrifices truth to a supposed expediency, the intellect of man to what is called his 'heart,' but is in reality nothing better than his mechanical efficiency. Comte may be right in supposing that a rigorous limitation of the intellect to certain fixed lines of enquiry will, within those limits, secure its utmost practical dexterity. But the gain, even if it were much more certain than it is, is in no sense worth the price at which it is sought.

The materialist finds one intelligible basis for the unity and reality of our knowledge. The spiritualist finds another, no less intelligible and, as it would seem, far more in accordance with the facts. The one discovers it in a world given to man ready made from without; the other in the constructive force of reason acting from within. Comte attempts a middle path. His scheme is neither honestly materialist, nor consistently spiritualist, but a half-hearted patchwork of both. He implies at one and the same moment that the world is given from without, and that the mind to which it is given is unable either to grasp its unity or to make sure of its reality. Both unity and reality remain as mere unacknowledged assumptions; assumptions which man is forbidden either to assert or to deny, but from which it is impossible that for a single instant he should escape. All that is left to man under these circumstances is to impose an arbitrary and fictitious unity upon his knowledge and to act as if he were assured of its reality; in other words, to construct for himself a Fool's Paradise, none the less foolish because at every step it invokes the sanction of science and claims for itself the title of the *Positive Philosophy*—a curiously inappropriate name for the most negative system that the wit of man has ever devised.

And this brings us to the central point of the agnostic theory, as handled by Comte. Other writers, perhaps profiting by his experience, have presented that theory in a less forbidding, if also in a less trenchant and less consistent, shape. Leaving a free hand to each and all of the subordinate sciences, they have confined their assault to the validity of metaphysics. So long as enquiry is directed to facts, they have said in effect, so long it need not despair of bringing to light some principle which may prove of importance, more or less far-reaching, to human knowledge. The facts of science, the facts of history, the facts of folk-lore—however minute, however trivial they may seem at the moment—may always hold within them a truth of inestimable worth. It is our duty, therefore, to collect and test them by all means at our command. It is only when enquiry seeks to pass beyond facts to theories, when it strives to investigate the first principles of things, above all when it sets itself to establish or to disprove the being of God, that it outsteps the limits which experience has shown to be imposed on man. That, then, is the one field which is henceforth closed to our search; the one field in which real knowledge is denied to us, and in which the appearance of it is nothing better than a mischievous delusion. There may be a God, a spiritual force, behind the phenomena of nature and of human life; or there may not. We cannot tell, and there is no need for us to ask. For, whether there is or no, the facts of human life and of nature remain absolutely the same; and they are the only things of which it seriously concerns us to have knowledge.

Such a theory was bound to find, and it has found, a host of supporters. It is plausible in itself; and, in a certain sense, it answers to a real need of human nature. The first, though not the only, need of man is, in truth, to gain the mastery over his own nature and over the world which science offers to him from without. And the agnostic is right in holding that the search for speculative truth has often gone both to distract him from these objects and to destroy the very sense of truth which it professes to serve. Under the spell of religion or metaphysics men have accepted impossible facts and degrading beliefs; they have admitted hypotheses which cannot possibly be verified; and, in the mouth of religious men at any rate, 'the truth' has not seldom come dangerously near to being a polite term for a lie. On these grounds it is well to remind men that, whether in religion or in metaphysics, they are not entitled to assume one jot more than is absolutely necessary to explain the facts of our experience. And, as the temptation is and will always be to carry assumption far beyond that point, the protest lodged by the agnostic creed against the legitimacy of any assumption whatsoever cannot be regarded as

entirely without justification. Therein lie both its usefulness and its plausibility.

Thus, in theory at least, the agnostic creed bars out all explanations of the universe, and of the manner in which man comes to the knowledge of it, indifferently and impartially. The materialist interpretation of nature and knowledge falls under its ban no less completely than the spiritualist. Whether in fact it has succeeded in keeping itself as clear of the former, as it has to all appearance of the latter, is another question. What concerns us here is to enquire how far the theory in itself is tenable, and how far those who adopt it are in truth as able to exclude the appeal to a spiritual principle as they suppose.

The answer must be that it is impossible for the mind of man to avoid seeking for some explanation of its experience; and that, since the time of Hume, a consistently materialist explanation has been impracticable. The metaphysical spirit, so hateful to the agnostic, is, in fact, but an extension of the scientific spirit, which is the sheet-anchor of his faith. Both alike are prompted by the irrepressible instinct to learn the reason of things; both are equally justified in obeying it. Moreover, as might have been expected, the further back enquiry is pushed, the more it becomes impossible to maintain a rigid line between the scientific study of facts and their metaphysical interpretation. As might also have been expected, that interpretation tends more and more to become not only metaphysical, but spiritual, in its character. Nothing, perhaps, in the history of scientific thought is more remarkable than this.

In his study of nature man has passed successively from objects to laws, and from laws to forces. Even the conception of force comes to be recognised as more and more inadequate to express the energies revealed by the discoveries of modern science; and in its turn seems destined to give way to something still more subtilised and refined. With each step in this direction, it becomes more and more impossible to draw a hard and fast line between the 'positive' and the metaphysical, between the material and the spiritual; or to say that the one is, and the other is not, accessible to man. It is doubtless true that the chief use of metaphysical conceptions and the chief evidence of the spiritual principle in life will always lie rather in the region of philosophy than in that of science. But even science, and the material world revealed by science, bring us now nearer to the acceptance of those conceptions and the admission of that principle than would have been thought possible half a century ago. And the ceaseless instinct of enquiry, to which this change is due, is nothing more than a development of that 'positive' spirit, which, we are told, has for ever banished the spiritual world from the field of man's observation.

The impossibility of excluding the spiritual element from knowledge becomes still more apparent when we turn from the region of science to the region of philosophy; from an enquiry into the ideas of which we consciously make use in our study of nature to an analysis of the unconscious process through which we pass in the acquisition of any knowledge whatsoever. The criticism of Kant has proved beyond all reasonable question that, in conceiving the simplest object, the mind of man passes beyond the sphere of sensation and employs ideas—space and time, cause and effect—which it does not find in the brute promptings of sensation, but brings with it to their interpretation. It is true that, apart from what is given (at least ultimately) in sensation, these organic conceptions have no use and no meaning. But it is equally true that, apart from them in turn, each sensation would end in itself and offer no permanent, nor even any intelligible, message to our mind. As Kant sums up the matter, 'Thought without the content of sensation is empty; sensation without thought is blind.'

If this be a true account of the matter, it is clear that, from the very first, an element which can only be called spiritual has been at work in the formation of our knowledge and that, without this, no knowledge would be possible. How far the working of that element is subsequently extended—whether, as Kant urged, it is always (in the sphere of the speculative, and apart from that of the practical, reason) limited to ordering the 'blind manifold' of sensation, or whether, as later thinkers have shown ground for believing, it has even within the range of speculative thought a wider application—that is a question into which there is no need for us to enter. All that here concerns us is to point out that there is no fact of our experience so simple but that it cries out for a metaphysical analysis, and that such an analysis at once brings us face to face with an element which is indispensable to the acquisition of the most beggarly knowledge and which, at the same time, is beyond question spiritual in its nature.

Thus the 'positive' spirit is unable to exclude metaphysical conceptions from the world of science. It is equally unable to avoid that spiritual interpretation of nature, in which it would seem that those conceptions inevitably result. The former consequence is that with which we are immediately concerned; and it is strange that it was not foreseen from the first. For what, after all, is involved in the attempt to stifle the discussion of the problems of metaphysics? It is not merely that a natural instinct of man's reason is deliberately thwarted. Nor is it even that this instinct, banished under its own name, returns in triumph under another. The real mischief of the attempt lies deeper than this.

It assails the foundations of knowledge; it destroys our assurance of the reality of the world of nature.

To maintain this assurance, it makes no difference whether the material explanation of our knowledge, or the spiritual, be proved. Either of them, if true, affords a completely satisfactory and consistent basis for the existence of an objective world and for the possibility of its being known by man. But to reject both of them and at the same time to deny the possibility of any third alternative, to assert that the knowledge of such matters is for ever denied to man, this is a resource ingenious perhaps, but nothing short of intellectual suicide.

Reduce the agnostic argument to its simplest form, and it amounts to this. What Nature in herself, and apart from our purely phenomenal knowledge of her, may be is unknown to us. Whether she has any existence apart from our observation is equally unknown. All that belongs to us is to make the most of the knowledge that we have, or seem to have, without enquiring into its origin or troubling ourselves about its foundation. Whether, in fact, there is any world corresponding to that 'knowledge' and whether, if there be, it is in truth regulated by those laws which our 'observation' has constructed—these are questions which we can never answer and with which, therefore, we have no concern.

The question here, it must be remembered, is not whether certain definite fields of knowledge, larger or smaller, which are admittedly barred to us at the present moment, will remain closed to us for ever. It is not the question, for instance, if we shall always remain as ignorant whether the heavenly bodies are inhabited as we certainly are now. Knowledge on particular points of this nature, if attained, might indeed correct our judgement on particular points of the experience we have already gathered, but it would leave the general framework of that experience untouched. Such questions, on the other hand, as the existence of God or the reality of the world as we know it, are of a wholly different scope. They affect the whole fabric of our experience, and every detail of it, in the most vital manner. They are, therefore, questions which we have not the right, nor even the power, deliberately to thrust aside.

If it be really true that such questions lie beyond our ken, then it is equally true that Nature, in any substantial and objective sense, becomes unknowable. The observations that man makes, the experience that he receives, would always remain *his* observations and *his* experience. He would have no warrant for saying that there is any objective counterpart to them whatsoever. And, if it be true that our experience cannot be proved to have objective

reality, then all our science is an illusion and we may spare ourselves the pains of pursuing it further. As a matter of fact, this is an inference which no man either will or can consent to draw. Do what he may, the assumption of an objective reality underlies every one of his mental and bodily acts, and is confirmed by every one of them. To question this, and at the same time to continue in action which assumes it to lie altogether beyond question, is absurd.

Thus the agnostic creed is logically bound to go further in scepticism than it either professes or desires. It not only holds God in suspense, but Nature also. It undermines not only religion, but science. It admits the possibility of a spiritual world, side by side with the phenomenal world of our experience; and, in the same breath, denies that it can be known. But, once admit the possibility of a knowledge for ever beyond our reach, of a reality which to us can never become real, and even that knowledge, that reality, which we assert to be still left us, is destroyed. Who can tell that it is not a pure illusion, contradicted, if we only knew it, at every moment by that other knowledge, that other reality, which may exist silently by the side of it, but which to all eternity lies out of our grasp? The materialist interpretation of the universe, grave as are the objections to it, is reasonable in comparison with this.

Such is the agnostic theory in its most familiar, which is also its more recent, form; and such are the criticisms which it suggests. From some of those criticisms the particular form of the theory advanced by Comte is comparatively clear. To others, and those the more fundamental of them, it is equally exposed. The chief objections to the commoner form of the theory, as we have seen, are two. It is inconsistent, in that, while professing to banish metaphysical conceptions, it in reality admits them, though doubtless under a qualified shape, into the field of science; nor can it escape from an analysis which reveals the working of such conceptions even in our commonest experience. It is self-destructive, in that, while professing to wage war only on metaphysics, it in reality does away with the possibility of any objective knowledge whatsoever.

Now from the former of these objections Comte may claim to pass, in a large degree, untouched. By his resolute avoidance of metaphysical discussion—an avoidance in him far more rigorously maintained than in other writers of his school—he at least disguises the flimsiness of the ground on which his theory ultimately rests. By barring out all enquiry into first and final causes, he effectually closes the door to all those investigations concerning the nature of matter and the origin of species in which modern science has found so rich a harvest but which, at the same time, have

undoubtedly broken down the barrier, so essential to the agnostic theory, between it and metaphysics. It is true that the exclusion of such enquiries debar the faithful Comtist from what has proved the most fruitful of all the regions of scientific research. Darwin is a closed book to him; the speculations of recent physics are forbidden ground. But for that he is prepared. The High Priest of Humanity has spoken, and the disciple has no choice but to obey. So far, then, the agnosticism of Comte compares favourably with that of more recent writers. It is more ruthless in its hostility to free enquiry. But, for that very reason, it is also more consistent.

Just in proportion, however, as Comte guards himself from criticism on this side, he lays himself open to it still more flagrantly upon the other. All forms of the agnostic theory surrender the objective reality of knowledge. Comte's form of it does so without a struggle and without disguise. Other agnostics have claimed, and honestly striven, to make the pursuit of knowledge an end in itself. Comte expressly confines it to the satisfaction of the practical needs of mankind. Others have limited the scope of knowledge under a mistaken belief that they were quickening its intensity. To Comte the very desire of knowledge for its own sake came at last to be a stumbling-block and an offence.

Thus the very extremities to which Comte pushes the agnostic theory are at once fatal to its acceptance. In any form, it is open to grave objections. In the form adopted by Comte, it is an outrage on common sense. There is, however, one sense in which he is more plausible, as well as more thorough-going, than his successors. They, like him, destroy the objective foundation of knowledge. But, since in their case the result is entirely unintentional, they do not, as he does, attempt to put anything in its place. The substitute that he proposes—the service of mankind—may not be, and is not, a fair equivalent for that which it displaces. A knowledge which has not any objective reality cannot either be of any practical utility. Before we are able to serve mankind with it we must be assured that it is intrinsically true. Yet, illusory as Comte's foundation is, it is—in theory, if not in practice—better than no foundation at all. And when once the desire of learning the ultimate truth of things is withdrawn—as it is by any conceivable form of the agnostic faith—it is difficult to see what other foundation, apart from the impulse to serve mankind, is left.

But, with all the merits of comparative consistency, the theory of Comte is ruinous from the coping-stone to the very foundation. Professing to give science such a place both in the intellectual and the social life of man as it has never held before, he starts with a wholesale purgation of the existing sciences and ends with destroying the certainty, the rational foundation, of all. He comes with



blessings to science on his lips; but, before his task is done, behold he has cursed it altogether. And, what is yet more strange, it would seem that, to the very last, he never realised what he was about. There is, it must be confessed, an incurable confusion in all that Comte writes about the deeper questions affecting our knowledge. It was the price he paid for his contempt of metaphysics.

That confusion can perhaps most readily be illustrated from the following reference to Kant. The passage is so significant, so typical of Comte's method of dealing with these subjects, that it is well to transcribe it in full: <sup>1</sup>

'The mere thought of such invariable relations in the external world presupposes, as Kant properly saw, at once an object to bear the relation and a subject to observe it. Even the relations which exist between two inorganic bodies can only be perceived in virtue of the connection which binds both to an intelligent and, in the first instance, a living being. Thus the motive of *life*, properly so called, of life as defined by modern biology, forms a necessary element of every conception that has reality. There are, no doubt, many heavenly bodies incapable of sustaining any organism, animal or even vegetable; those bodies, for instance, in our system which are without an atmosphere. But even if, contrary to all probability, our own planet were the only habitable one, it is absolutely necessary that life and thought should be developed at least there, before the smallest existence, having reality, can be conceived of. In a word, every phenomenon presupposes a spectator to observe it, since its being invariably consists in a determinate relation between an object and a subject.'

According to this passage, which is substantially—and, if possible, in a still more puerile form—repeated in another volume, we can only conclude that, in Comte's view, the action of thought is, in some mysterious manner, less necessary to the conception of inorganic, than of organic, objects. We are also driven to infer that, to him (if not to Kant), the logical relation between subject and object is connected with the material relation between organic and inorganic existence. Finally we are forced to believe that Comte identifies, and supposes Kant also to identify, the being of

[<sup>1</sup> *Politique Positive*, i. p. 439. According to Höffding (*History of Modern Philosophy*, Eng. trans., vol. ii. p. 586), 'the only work of Kant with which he was directly acquainted was the small treatise, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Weltgeschichte*, which his friend Gustave d'Eichthal translated for him (1824), and which he greatly admired. Had he become acquainted with it six or seven years earlier, he says, it would have saved him the trouble of writing his treatises of the years 1820 and 1822 (Letter to Eichthal, Dec. 10, 1824).' ED.]

things with the perception of them—*esse* with *percipi*—thus taking refuge in a doctrine which, however important as a stage in the development of modern philosophy, is in itself untenable because it avowedly surrenders the objective reality of the world as we perceive it, and which, whatever its merits, is assuredly not the doctrine put forward by Kant. And, if this be the case, we have no choice but to pronounce that Comte had not taken the trouble to master either the meaning of Kant or the most elementary conditions of the problem with which he professes to deal.

And, if this is his method of handling the primary problems of our experience, ought we to wonder at the inconsistency and the levity which startle us in his treatment of the secondary problems among which he more habitually moves? Is it surprising that the founder of the Positive Philosophy should have gravely made himself the champion of fetish-worship, that he should have sunk to the lunacies of the Virgin-mother, or trifled with the solemn mummeries of the Grand Being, the Grand Fetish and the Grand Medium? Truly may Comte claim to have swept the absolute out of man's intellectual horizon. But, with the absolute, he has also made a clearance of the substantial and the real. He is left with nothing to guide him but his own lawless caprice.

It is a relief to turn to the moral and social side of Comte's speculations. Here, too, there is much fault to find with the superstructure. But the groundwork, the central conception, at least is sound.

The starting-point of Comte's social theory is, as we have seen, the supremacy of the community. 'The individual is an abstraction, the community alone is real'—it would be difficult to express more exactly, or more pointedly, the idea in which the thought of the generation preceding Comte had found its most fruitful issue and which it has been the task of the following generation to work out in practice. Nor would it be easy to overrate the part which the influence of Comte has borne in paving the way for its acceptance. It is true that such a conception accords extremely ill with the results of Comte's intellectual enquiry. But the world in general cares little for speculative consistency. And the very absence of speculative thoroughness has perhaps served Comte better with public opinion than many of his more shining qualities.

Where, then, does the discrepancy in Comte's system lie, and what are its effects? In the answers to these two questions falls all that need be said on this part of our subject.

Between Comte's account of the reason, as a speculative organ, and his account of the same reason, as an instrument of action, there is a gulf which no ingenuity can bridge. As a speculative

organ, it has no constructive quality and no initiative. It has not even the power, in any substantial sense, of ascertaining the truth. Its only function is to bring an arbitrary and factitious order into the confused material supplied to it from without. As an instrument of action it has all the faculties of which, in its speculative use, it is deprived. It makes its own world, it determines its own goal. It is capable of conceiving an end which is not only alien but antagonistic to the selfish interests of the individual, and that end it is no less capable of attaining. In a word, it is creative, self-determined and ideal. Could any contradiction be greater than that which Comte's theory compels him to postulate between the one function of reason and the other? How can a faculty, which on the intellectual side is so weak, rise on the moral side to such plenitude of strength? How, when it is powerless to grapple with the simplest problems of speculation, can it base its whole moral life upon an idea so abstract, so remote from all sensible experience, as devotion to humanity?

As might have been expected, the whole of Comte's subsequent system, moral and political, is vitiated by this initial inconsistency. And, in the first place, it is to this that is directly due his misleading opposition of the heart to the head, and the primacy which he assigns to the former as against the latter. The one is, on his own showing, of a totally different nature from the other; the difference is bound to end in conflict; and in such a conflict the right clearly belongs to the higher and nobler element; not to that which is essentially limited and dependent, but to that whose energies are infinite and whose law is in itself.

The consequences of these assumptions are accepted by Comte in their extremest sense. The antithesis between the two sides of man's activity, unfortunate enough in any case, leads step by step to conclusions more unfortunate yet. The 'practical reason'—which, in its original conception, honestly deserved the name of reason—comes more and more to lose its rational character. It sinks more and more to the nature of a blind instinct, a bundle of 'altruistic' nerves. Hence the contempt with which Comte invariably speaks of the virtues of forethought; hence his eagerness to lodge all political control with the 'affective' classes of the community, the women and the 'proletaries'; hence, finally, his readiness to adopt the 'heart' for a term adequate to express the reason as the power of willing and of action. It is a term misleading in itself, and bound to bring with it consequences yet more far-reaching than those who employ it can be supposed to have foreseen. It, in effect, closes the door to all speculation about the moral qualities of man and to all hope of practical progress.

For what is involved in so pointed a choice of terms? Not

only does Comte habitually and by preference speak of the practical reason under the name of the heart; but he habitually also draws a sharp contrast between it and the intellect. He thus does his best to rob the will of all rational character; he reduces it to the level of an unintelligent and unintelligible instinct; and that instinct he exalts at the expense of the reason, to which it is thus arbitrarily opposed. Now, if the Will were really of the nature that Comte supposes it to be, we should not be entitled to say that it was either above the intellect or beneath it. Strictly speaking, we should be unable to say anything of it at all. A being whose actions were really determined by instinct would be one incapable of reasoning about those actions in any way. It could no more speculate about them, after commission, than it could deliberate upon them before it. An instinct, in the strict sense of the term, requires no justification and admits of none. It lies altogether outside the pale of reasoning. To attempt to measure it against reason is, in effect, to give up the one, but sufficient, ground on which it stands. And it is just because the faculties of man—active as well as speculative—are not of this order, that he is capable of framing theories of morals and systems of political philosophy. On Comte's own showing the *System of Positive Politics* should never have been written.

Let it be granted, however, that what Comte understands by the 'heart' is not an instinct in the strict sense of the term, but an instinct qualified by reason and amenable to reason. In that sense—a sense, however, not easily to be reconciled with Comte's recurring antithesis of heart to head—the 'heart' might logically be brought into comparison with the reason; only, it would be not as the higher but the lower power; not as the master but the servant. If the reason plays any part at all in the constitution of the will, is it conceivable that this should be any other than that of guidance, and not only of guidance but also of impulsion, of motive power?

By Comte, as we have seen, no such conclusion is drawn. To him, as to Hume, the motive power is drawn not from the reason but from the 'affections'; in plain English, from the passions. And such guidance as the reason offers is confined to the choice of means; in determining the end, it has no voice whatsoever. Only, whereas to Hume the passions remain mere passions—the purely animal instincts of self-esteem and self-preservation—to Comte they are qualified by what, with all its disguises, is nothing more nor less than the conception of duty. Thus, while the account of Hume is, judged by its own standard, consistent enough, that of Comte is a jumble of the most discordant elements that have ever been forced together in the same melting-pot. His moral theory,

like his theory of knowledge, is a patchwork taken partly from Hume and partly from Kant; and both parts are spoiled in the taking. On the one hand we have 'affection' without reason determining the end. On the other hand we have reason without 'affection' deliberating on the means. But the latter—the intellect or reason—is constantly identified with the selfish instincts of man; and therefore, so far from being without affection, is nothing more than a particular, and extremely unmanageable, kind of the affections, masquerading under a disguise. The former is only another name for the sense of duty—a principle of reason, if there ever was one.

It may be urged that this is merely a question of names. The answer is that names are important. In this case, behind the confusion of terminology there lies a serious confusion of thought; and behind both there lies a conception vague, no doubt, but none the less disastrous in its consequences. That is the disparagement of reason. It is no light thing to disparage reason, even if it be only in the choice of terms. And the man who begins by denying the name of reason to the constitutive or creative powers of the will is almost certain to end by denying the initiative of reason on the practical side, and consequently by shutting the door to all progress in the world of action. Certainly the High Priest of Humanity found it an easy step from the one measure to the other. In morals, as in knowledge, his ideal proves to be not progress but stagnation. By the foundation of an official priesthood, however little he may have intended it, he gave ample security for that.

This, then, is the first consequence of the discrepancy between Comte's views of the speculative and of the practical reason. His conception of man's moral life is stunted. By dwarfing the part played by reason in the things of the will, he sacrifices all freedom and all progress.

The same tendency reappears in his treatment of history. So far as words go, no man could insist more strongly upon the idea of historical continuity. In reality, no man has handled it more capriciously, or with less grasp of its meaning and its consequences. The importance of this idea to the positive theory of politics—which, so far as professions count, is essentially a theory of evolution—is manifest. If the standard of any community at a given moment is fixed by its past history, it follows that no vital stage in that history is to be overlooked or ignored. Directly that is done, all the conditions of the problem are tainted. Continuity becomes a mere name; to speak of evolution is a palpable fraud.

Now, it is certain that these principles are habitually disregarded by Comte. A few crucial instances will suffice to prove it. Such are his utterances on Protestantism and on Fetishism.

If one thing appears plainly from the history of the last four centuries, it is that the Reformation was an essential stage in the development of modern thought and activity. The Protestant movement had many limitations; it had a weak side no less than a strong one. And it was quite open to Comte, if he were so minded, to drive home these deficiencies to the utmost of his ability. So far there was nothing inconsistent with that belief in historical continuity from which he started. All great movements show the same blending of width and narrowness. All carry within them the germs of that which is destined ultimately to supersede them. And it is the duty of the historical thinker to lay his finger, in each case, at once upon the congenital weakness which leads slowly but surely to the decay and death of the one element and upon the principle of life which expands gradually into the full growth of the other.

Of this task Comte attempts only the former, and less profitable, half. For the weaker side of Protestantism, for its individualism and its disruptive tendencies, he has the eye of a lynx. But of the incalculable benefits that it brought—of the force with which it deepened the religious sense of men and won for them freedom alike in thought and action—he has nothing to say. How should he, seeing that freedom was unintelligible to him, and religion, as commonly understood, a childish superstition? In spite of saving clauses—clauses obviously due to the necessity of saving his position—the general drift of his utterances on this subject is assuredly to prove that the Reformation was a disastrous episode and that the few benefits which it offered had already been given to the world by Islamism or might have been drawn, with time and patience, from Catholicism itself. The ‘Pretended Reformation,’ ‘the nations preserved from Protestantism,’ are recurring phrases which sufficiently show the true mind of the writer.<sup>1</sup> They would be intelligible enough in the mouth of a Catholic. In one who claims to be a ‘positive’ historian, they are grotesque.

It is not, however, the injustice of this view, nor its lack of historical insight, that we are here concerned with. It is the impossibility of squaring it with those ideas of evolution and historical continuity in which Comte professes to find the basis of all positive enquiry. If evolution in human history means anything, it is that the development of mankind must be taken as a whole, and that each marked stage to be traced in it has contributed something essential to the general result. And if—as Comte holds and as he is surely right in holding—the general result is not towards the worse but towards the better, then it is impossible that any crucial step—any step by which, as a matter of fact, that result

[<sup>1</sup> See especially *Politique Positive*, iii. pp. 548 sqq.]

has been reached—should have reversed the process and have been not towards the good but towards the evil.

Comte evades this difficulty by the implied contention that the importance of the Reformation has been grossly overrated; that it was, in the strictest sense of the term, a mere episode; and that, therefore, in the wide sweep of human progress it can hardly be said to count. Such an argument would come well enough from a Catholic. To him it may well be that, both on the intellectual and the religious side, the Reformation is a mere eddy in the current, a passing delusion of no substance and no significance. But that is because he is convinced that, in the long run, the world will come back substantially to the creed of medieval Christendom, and because he is blind to the vast changes wrought by the Reformation within the bosom of Catholicism itself. Comte is under neither of these misapprehensions. He allows perhaps something more than justice to the influence of the 'pretended Reformation' upon the creed and practice of Catholicism. And he looks forward, with childlike faith, to the wholesale absorption of Catholics in the religion of humanity. He does not argue either that Catholicism is the final resting-place of the human spirit, or that it has gone untouched by the phase of religious belief which, as a matter of fact, supplanted it over a great part of Western Europe. To him, therefore, the Reformation is not a negligible quantity; nor is the system, which it partly overthrew and partly modified, by rights eternal. Both alike are phases; both alike were necessary halting-places in the general progress of the West. And there is no reason for saying that the one is more of a mere phase, that it is less important or less necessary, than the other. Indeed, if a difference is to be drawn between them, it should clearly be in favour rather of the later than of the earlier stage in a process which, by Comte's own admission, is common to both. From the mere fact of being later, the Protestant faith represents a deeper and fuller reading of man's experience than that which it displaced. And to show in detail that this was so would be an easy task, if there were any need to attempt it.

The truth is that, with all his scepticism, Comte never escaped from the bondage of Catholic ideas. To the end he kept half the prejudices and all the servility of the counter-reformation. Neither on the side of religion, nor on that of intellectual and social freedom, was he fitted for an unbiassed judgement. His very scepticism was an obstacle to impartiality. For one to whom the idea of God in any shape was repulsive, it mattered little what was the exact shape which at a given moment that idea might happen to take. When all is said and done, it is but a degree more or less of superstition. And if, as Protestants believe, their faith

in God is deeper and more intense than that of the Catholics, so much the worse for them. They are only sunk more deeply in superstition than their opponents.

Thus much for the sphere of religion. In that of intellectual and social ideas the case is plainer yet. Neither in the one nor in the other does Comte attempt to understand the position of the Protestants; neither in the one nor in the other does he leave any place for freedom. His ideal, like that of the Catholics, is a rigorous censorship both of human thought and human conduct. The new priesthood, like the old, has its grip alike on speculation and on action. It decrees both what men are to think and what they are to do. Comte is never weary of praising the skill and wisdom with which the old priesthood directed the life of medieval Christendom, nor of regretting that they cannot be retained as missionaries in the service of 'positivity.' And how should it be otherwise? His aims are, at bottom, their aims, and his methods are their methods. Like them, he works not through freedom, but through authority. Like them, he is bent on putting the energies of man under regulation and restriction. Like them, he seeks to establish a spiritual autocracy.

Now it is against this principle, at least as much as against any other element of the Catholic system, that the Protestant movement, when we come to the final summing of its account with history, is found to have been directed. The earlier Reformers were, doubtless, but half conscious that they were fighting the battle of free thought against authority. But, as time went on, freedom came more and more to be the watchword of the whole struggle. Alike in Holland, in England and in the American colonies, it was for this, no less than for a purer conception of God, that the finer spirits of the movement recognised that they were doing battle. 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely, according to conscience, above all liberties,' said Milton; and in this he was but the inspired mouthpiece of all that was noblest and most far-seeing among the Reformers of his day.

There are two possible ways of conceiving the advance of human thought. It may be regarded either as a free growth, or as an artificially regulated construction. In the one case the parts must be left to adjust themselves by their own inherent vitality. In the other the shaping of each part must be directed by the organ entrusted with the charge and government of the whole. Each of these methods rests upon a more or less conscious assumption. The latter takes for granted that the governing organ will habitually have the wisdom to discover what exactly is the advance needed at every point, and how far the need will



be met by any given proposal for reform; a startling assumption, if there ever was one. The former presupposes that there is a collective wisdom in humanity and that, in the long run, this may be trusted to correct the mistakes and harmonise the discrepancies of individual licence or eccentricity. This belief, again, depends ultimately on the assumption that the reason of the individual does not end in itself, but is part and parcel of the wider reason of mankind, as that, in its turn, reflects and rests upon the yet wider and fuller reason of God.

It would, of course, be idle to contend that the last inference, or any part of it, is accepted by all those who reject the establishment of an organised censorship. It is held by some that the gradual elimination of error from the gathered store of human knowledge is by no means so certain a thing as is commonly supposed; and that, even if it be allowed as a fact, it is due rather to happy accident than to the inherent strength of man's reason. And they point, in proof, to the large crop of delusions which perennially flourishes and which dies down in one shape only to spring up in another. This, it is urged, would be impossible if the reason of man were indeed so wide-reaching or so firmly based as has been claimed. There is, it is pleaded, no security against the triumph of delusion; nor is there even any certainty that what we now hold to be the surest truths will not ultimately be overthrown.

Such a view brings us back to the agnostic theory, of which enough has already been said. And if that is the only alternative—except the one offered by Comte—to a belief in the universality and spirituality of human reason, it is difficult to see how that belief can be evaded. If, as is commonly assumed, there is a certainty that individual aberrations will ultimately be set straight by the 'common sense' of the world, that can only be because there is a universal element in the reason of the individual; because, in virtue of that element, the perceptions of one man become the common property of all; and because, in virtue of the same element, whatever one man discovers, or thinks that he discovers, is capable of being tested, and must inevitably be tested, by a criterion which is common to all. In other words, it can only be because there is, in the strictest acceptance of the term, a *common* sense, which acts through the limitations and accidents of the individual reason, enabling it both to appropriate the experience of others and to submit his own to their judgement. And that common sense, in its turn, would be a mere illusion, unless it sprang from the principle of reason which shapes the world and makes it a possible object of rational experience. Man's experience of the world would have no reality, if the faculty through which he wins it

were not akin to that by which the world itself is moulded and sustained.

That, however, is a matter of speculation. What we have here to deal with is, in the first instance, a matter of history and of practical concern. And in this matter Comte stands virtually alone. Much as they may differ on the speculative grounds of their opinion, all parties are united both against his verdict on the past and against his recommendations for the future. From the Reformation onwards the whole course of human thought has been against the censorship, of which he is the uncompromising advocate. Were his principles accepted, the stream of progress would be suddenly turned backwards. We should revert to a policy which has against it the double weight of reason and tradition; a policy which is untenable in itself and which the wisdom of the world rejected more than two centuries ago. The evils which this policy entails have been proved by experience to be intolerable. The assumptions which it involves are incredible. No man, no body of men, is capable of laying down the lines which the thought and energy of mankind are to follow. But, over and above all this, is the absurdity—an absurdity peculiar to Comte himself—that a theory, which starts from the idea of evolution, should end with a violent reversal of the results which evolution has brought about. Comte professes to base himself on the historical development of ideas. In reality, he picks and chooses as the fancy seizes him; he arrests the recorded movement of history; he strikes one stage bodily from the process, and casts back to those ideals which, when that stage opened, were definitely, and justly, cast aside. After this, there can be no more talk of evolution. Comte's theory may have many virtues, but it certainly cannot claim to base the order and progress of the present upon the continuous development of the past.

The same inconsistency meets us in his treatment of Fetishism; and meets us under a yet more glaring form. In his search for forgotten causes and old abuses, Comte was irresistibly drawn to the oldest, the most forgotten and the most desperate of them all. The man who clung to the soulless machinery of Catholicism, while denouncing the inner faith which at least redeemed that machinery from contempt, was driven by a natural nemesis to seek his own religion, or the semblance of it, in forms that the world has long abandoned to the savage and the child. All that Comte says about the importance of Fetishism in the primitive ages of the world may—at least for the sake of argument—be fully granted. It may even be allowed that the child, in all ages of the world, will naturally cast his thoughts of things after the fashion of the savage. But that gives no ground for the contention that the man is bound

to sink his soul to the level of the child's, or that the world should go back fifty centuries for the form and substance of its spiritual faith. Yet this is what Comte's doctrine really comes to; and in his latest writings all concealment is dropped. The *Grand Fetish*, with its appurtenances the *Grand Being* and the *Grand Medium*, becomes the avowed object of positivist worship. With the *Grand Being* we have here nothing to do. It is the other two persons of the 'positive Trinity' that at this moment are alone in question.

Two criticisms, out of many, may be raised against this, the final form of the positive religion, and against the arguments on which it is built. The first is that the religion, so fixed together, is utterly unreal. Neither the *Grand Fetish* nor the *Grand Medium* contains any one of the elements for which men look in the object of their worship. Neither of them is capable of sympathy with man; neither of them is above man; both are immeasurably beneath him. We are therefore driven back on the vague sense of reverence and mystery, which without doubt lies at the root of all religion and, for that reason, may by a pardonable stretch of language be itself identified with religion. It is the minimum without which there can be no religion at all. But even to this minimum Comte, by his own showing, can lay no claim. Such reverence may fitly be felt by one who regards the world as the work of a higher power, even if he be unable to say precisely in what way that power puts forth its energy, or what exactly is the relation between it and the world which it sustains. It might conceivably be felt by one to whom the world is but the product of a blind, inexorable and wholly mechanical force. But to Comte, nature is neither the work of a higher power, nor the resultant of a purely mechanical and uncontrollable force.

She is not the former, because the existence of such a power lies, in his view, entirely beyond proof and, at the best, can never become more than a most disputable hypothesis. And, even if the hypothesis should happen to be a true one, that would make no difference to man; since to him it must always remain an hypothesis, a pure assumption which, from the nature of the case, it is impossible for him to verify. She is not the latter, because this too is an unverifiable hypothesis, an hypothesis which it is quite beyond man's power either to prove or to deny. Whichever alternative he takes, it is but a choice of shadows; of shadows which, before they can be worshipped, have by a pure fiction to be converted into substance. The levity with which Comte gives encouragement to such trifling is one of the least creditable features in the later developments of his system.

More than that. If, in one sense, the object of the positivist worship is a mere shadow, in another sense it is a thing with definite

qualities which make it lower, less noble, and therefore less worthy of worship, than the worshipper. It is so both on the speculative and on the moral side. On the speculative side, as an object of intellectual knowledge, nature is beneath man. By Comte's own admission, all that he can know of her is known in terms of his own consciousness. It is only through that consciousness, and on the strength of those terms, that he has any warrant for saying that she exists at all. And this position Comte accepts in its most extreme, and most untenable, form. To him nature is practically a pure assumption; and from that assumption he bids man, without troubling for its speculative foundation, to draw what practical benefits he can. The 'subjective method,' carried to its fair consequences, robs nature not only of her supremacy, but of her very independence. By what logic is she subsequently reinstated, under the guidance of the same method, not only as independent of man but as the object of his worship?

On the moral side, the inconsistency is still more glaring. What is the real ground on which throughout the whole of his later work Comte justifies the sacrifice of intellectual truth to moral edification? It is that the moral part of man's being is not only the more characteristic, but also the higher and the nobler, part. Now, neither Comte, nor any other serious thinker, has claimed morality for nature. 'Nature is without feeling,' said Goethe; and the whole of modern thought gives the echo to his words. That, however—on any interpretation and, above all, on that of Comte—amounts to saying that nature is beneath man. How then, under the transparent *alias* of the Grand Fetish or the Grand Medium, can nature suddenly become the recipient of man's worship? It is a miracle, wrought by the simple process of rechristening.

The result is absurd in itself. It is no less absurd as a link in an argument professedly based on evolution. If the final religion of man, the harmony of all that he has learned and all that he has become through centuries of struggle, is to find utterance in the most primitive form of worship upon record, it is clear that either the worship is a hollow form or the evolution an empty name. Comte may take his choice between the two alternatives. In either case he is juggling with words and trifling with the ideas for which they stand. Once more, his practical precepts cut at the root of his whole speculative system. Once more, the apostle of evolution annuls the principles on which the value of his life's work, alike in science and in political philosophy, depends.

We have seen the initial discrepancy between Comte's conception of the speculative and his conception of the practical reason. We have seen that it led to the virtual denial of all freedom and all

progress in the region of man's moral and intellectual ideas. We have seen that this, in its turn, makes void the principle of evolution from which he started. It remains to consider the result of these contradictions upon the relation which he establishes between the individual and the community; to turn from the discrepancies in his view of progress to those involved in his view of what, by an effort of abstraction, may be regarded as the stable order of the world. We have dwelt on the Positivist theory of what Comte loved to call 'social dynamics.' We now pass to the Positivist theory of 'social statics.'

'The individual is an abstraction, the community alone is real'—such is Comte's statement of the relation between the two elements of the social body. Profoundly true in one sense, it is misleading, and may even be perverted into a falsehood, in another. Everything depends upon the way in which it is worked out. If it be understood to mean that the moral and intellectual beliefs of the individual come to him through the community, and that, when we abstract from the individual all that he has received from the community, nothing substantial is left, then the words embody a truth, and a truth of deep-reaching significance. But if from this we infer that the individual is nothing more than a passive tool in the hands of the community, that he has no will of his own and cannot legitimately follow ends—material, moral or intellectual—of his own, then we have an utter misconception, and a misconception which infallibly leads to disaster and ruin.

Now it can hardly be denied that Comte is constantly overstepping the line which separates the true conception in this matter from the false. In the speculative field, as we have already seen, he tends to lose the particular in the universal, to treat the former as a mere instrument, indispensable to the attainment of the latter, but standing in no vital relation to it and having no value of its own. In the field of action and of moral ideas the same fallacy reappears. There is no healthy play of the individual upon the community. There is no provision for that criticism of current standards, moral and intellectual, which can only come from the individual and on which the vitality and, with it, the progress of the community ultimately depend. And the cause of this lies in the slavish subordination of the individual to the community, or rather to mankind.

Neither in his collective, nor in his personal, life is the individual of the *Politique Positive* a free agent. In the former he does not contribute anything substantial to the whole of which he is a part. In the latter he is, both intellectually and morally, at the mercy of an authority whose creed he has little choice but to accept and whose action he has no power to determine or control. In the former he

is a mere cypher. In the latter, an imperceptible fragment of a machine whose motive power lies entirely outside of him and by whose pulsations every motion of which he is capable is automatically governed. The name of 'solidarity,' of corporate life, is ever on Comte's lips. Sift his language, and behind it we shall find no substance, but only the empty phantom which fulfilled the ideals and flattered the ambitions of the medieval priesthood. In the middle ages it was perhaps impossible to realise, or even to concede, any unity higher than the mechanical one offered by the Church. But to revert to this at the present day is to ignore all that Europe has learnt from the long revolt against the dictation of the priesthood and the centuries of free activity which followed. Once more it is to strike an entire stage from the history of progress. It is to call on Christendom to end exactly where it began.

This is an historical absurdity. A speculative absurdity, no less gross, lies behind. Comte's view of the individual life, of the relation between the part and the whole in the body politic, is not drawn from the matter under discussion. It is not drawn from the facts of man's moral and social life. It is not even drawn from those of the animal organism. It is transferred from the alien matter of chemistry and physics. To him the particular, the individual, in politics is always coloured by his memories of the unit in chemistry, in physical speculation or even in mathematics. Its identity is lost in the whole no less completely than that of the element, the atom, or even the single figure of arithmetic. Indeed it is still more the latter and more abstract than the two former and more concrete sciences that he has habitually in mind. The individual of politics is, to him, a mere unit. It may almost be said to have no content, no intrinsic value, of its own. All that it has comes to it from a higher power or from the simple addition of other units, each of which, taken separately, is as empty and valueless as itself.

Now this is to misconceive the whole nature of political union. It is the essence of that union to be infinitely more complex and more far-reaching than the union postulated by any one of the lower sciences. On the one hand, the whole has a far wider and closer grip upon the parts—on the other hand, the parts have a far larger and fuller share in determining the life of the whole—than is the case with the objects treated in any one of the inferior sciences, biology itself not excepted. It is true that the content of the individual's moral and intellectual life is drawn, almost entirely, from the community of which he is a part. But it is also true that the community, in its turn, has drawn that content from no source but the collective energies, and that its corporate life can find no

utterance save in the individual will and intellect of its several members. The community itself is in the first instance built up out of the material offered by individual character; and it remains a blank form until its members have drawn to themselves the ideal which it embodies; have appropriated it, so far as each is capable of doing so; and have worked it out, each for himself, under the limits imposed by his own reason, his own will, his own natural endowment. It is made only by individuals, and it works only through individuals. If, on the one hand, 'the individual without the community is an abstraction,' so, on the other hand, is the community without the individual. And that side of the truth is habitually overlooked by Comte.

The result is that, without intending it, Comte merely reverses the fallacy of Rousseau. In political union Rousseau sees nothing but the free will of the individual; Comte nothing but the compulsive force of the civil, and the moral pressure (hardly less compulsive) of the spiritual power. Rousseau virtually abolishes the corporate life of man; Comte, at least in name, retains it and insists upon it. But each alike reduces both terms of the series to an empty form. To Rousseau the individuals of the social contract are an aggregate of equal and indistinguishable atoms; the life resulting from that contract is therefore one of colourless uniformity. To Comte the corporate life exists in complete independence of the individual members; it is therefore only a sounding name for universal death. The individuals of his system are without reason, without will, without character of their own. By different paths the two men have worked their way to the same goal; the destruction of individuality upon the one hand, the annihilation of anything that deserves to be called corporate life upon the other.

And the strange thing is that, of the two, Rousseau comes far nearer to the truth than his antagonist and successor. The individualism of Rousseau is, after all, only one side of the *Contrat Social*. The 'pedantocracy' of the *Politique Positive* is the very keystone of the arch of Comte. Rousseau at least secured the formal freedom of the individual, though, in so doing, he blotted out all those distinctions of will and intellect which alone can give to that freedom its real value or significance. He at least proclaimed the existence of a 'general will,' a corporate life, distinguishable from the will of the individuals who create it, yet inspired by all of them and impossible without the harmonious action of them all. And, though he failed to establish any intelligible relation between the one will and the other, to explain how the *volonté générale* stood to the *volonté de tous*, he at least pointed the way along which later thinkers were to follow. With Comte

there are no such sidelights and no such anticipations of the future. His system is a dungeon without mitigation and without hope. Consciously or unconsciously, he destroys both the will of the individual and the will of the community. The former he tramples under foot. The latter he confines to a ruling caste; for mankind at large it is an empty name.

The individual on the one hand, humanity upon the other—who shall bridge the immensity of the gulf which parts the two extremities from each other? How, with nothing to mediate between them, can either escape the hollowness of a mere abstraction? Here perhaps, more than in any other single point, lies the incurable weakness of the polity devised by Comte. The *Politique Positive* proposes to base itself upon the indestructible elements of human nature. Compare it with the record which that nature has writ large upon the pages of history, and then say what the two things have in common. On the one side, the play of concrete passions; on the other, a schedule of shadowy abstractions.

Ambition and rivalry within, rivalry and war without—how much of history is made up of the action, sometimes destructive, sometimes healthy, of these wild forces, the inevitable outcome of the two primary elements of civil life, the individual and the nation, as they have shaped themselves in actual practice throughout the past and as they must continue to shape themselves for some time yet to come? And how much allowance is made for them in the Utopia of Comte? War is not, ambition is not, individuality is not, nationality is not. Everything goes with the smug uniformity of a calculating machine.

That wars shall cease is a dream which Comte shares with other and greater men. And it would be unjust to blame him beyond measure for the enormous miscalculation which, on the eve of an age of wars as frequent as any in history and as bloody, led him to the conviction that now at last this dream was about infallibly to be fulfilled. It is a disgrace to humanity that war should still be reckoned a permissible settlement of national quarrels. And much may be forgiven to the man who believes, even in the teeth of evidence, that the iniquity of wholesale bloodshed is at length to be branded by the conscience of the world as it deserves.

For the other omissions in Comte's analysis of society the same excuse cannot be offered; least of all for his infatuated exclusion of nationality. The other elements are struck out with some kind of apology. Nationality is dropped silently, as though Comte were entirely unaware what he was about; and this at the moment when it was playing a larger part in moulding the destinies



of man than it has done at any time since the Roman empire was broken up by the great migration.

And what is the effect of this omission upon the coherence of Comte's theory? It strikes out the middle term from the series; and, by the mere fact of doing so, it destroys not only the relation between the remaining terms, but their very meaning and substance. It reduces the whole system to a bundle of abstractions. Other causes, no doubt, were at work to bring about this result. Comte's conception of the individual, for instance, was, as we have already seen, in itself radically vicious. But whatever faults were already in the system are closely bound up with that which is now in question. Whatever flaws were from the first ingrained in it are aggravated still further by the virtual exclusion of nationality.

The nation is, in truth, the meeting point between the individual and humanity; a halting-place between the narrowness of the one and the vague immensity of the other. It unites elements which the other two terms of the series hold jealously apart. Individuality, by itself, is a purely selfish principle. It is so, by Comte's own admission, with certain qualifications; it is so, without any qualification, according to the facts. Humanity, on the other hand, is a principle absolutely unselfish. If put in practice without regard to other considerations, it would destroy itself and everything else. Humanity is, no doubt, indispensable to the well-being of the world; but individuality is necessary to its very being. Now the principle of nationality—like that of the patriarchal family or the tribe in times more primitive, only in a far more complete and higher form—combines things which in those other principles are disjointed. It conciliates things which in them are mutually opposed. It is akin, on the one side, to the selfish principle which finds its fullest expression in the individual. It is akin, on the other side, to the unselfish principle which for us is most fully represented by humanity. In any given nation, taken as a whole, it operates largely through antagonism, more or less acute, to other nations. But to the individual members of that nation it opens a door for self-sacrifice, the devotion of self to purely public ends, such as is offered not more fully by humanity itself. And so it is that the nation unites the exclusiveness, the self-centred energy, of the individual with the comprehensiveness, the power of challenging unselfish action, which belongs to mankind. It is the connecting link, without which the other two must infallibly fall apart.

So far the case has been put on purely abstract and speculative grounds. The same result is yielded when we turn to those concrete and historical considerations on which—Comte himself being the judge—all political and social questions must largely, though not solely, be decided. Granted, for the sake of argument,

that humanity offers all that is good in the element of nationality, and nothing that is questionable or evil; it still remains to prove that, in this form, the principle—even if we assume it to be identical with that embodied in nationality—is likely to win general acceptance. Few things can be more certain than that it is not.

To most men humanity is a conception so remote, and so difficult of realisation, that it can hardly be said to convey any definite meaning to their intellect; much less, to supply a motive capable of influencing action. Put it before any mind which has not received a very special training, and the result will be little better than a blank. And if this be the only form in which the idea of corporate life is presented to men, the consequence must infallibly be that they will have no corporate life at all. To the common run of men the nation is the one and only embodiment of public spirit, of the sense of corporate life, which can in any measure be reckoned adequate. Banish the nation—put the trade's union, the Church, the profession, in its stead—and what will have been gained? Only that, in place of an ideal at least comparatively broad and liberal, one narrow, cramping and sectarian, will have been set up. Each and all of these smaller associations has its place. But it is essentially a subordinate place. It is a place within the all-inclusive community which we call the nation. The moment any one of them usurps, be it unintentionally or by design, upon the functions of the nation, its very virtue is distorted into something hardly to be distinguished from a vice. And so long as human nature is what it is, the only result of Comte's action in weakening nationality will be to make such usurpations more frequent and more venomous. It needs no prophet to tell us that if men are driven from nationality they will take refuge, not in the more comprehensive area of union, but in the less; not in humanity, but in the sect, the class or the clique.

What, again, is to be done with the instinct of nationality? Under existing conditions, it undoubtedly *is* an instinct; and, as such, it cannot summarily be banished from the minds of men because a lively philosopher chooses to condemn it. It may be ignored, but it cannot be destroyed. And the only effect of prohibiting its open action is to drive it under ground; in other words, to make it ten times more noxious than, even on Comte's own showing, it can ever have been before.

It may, indeed, be urged—by Comte himself it probably would have been urged—that nationality is a spent force. That is an opinion which in the days of Voltaire may have been intelligible. To the man who had grown up under the German and Spanish wars of independence, and who wrote with the Italian struggle for freedom before his very eyes, it should have been impossible. If

such a belief were indeed held by Comte, it is only one more proof of his inability to read the plainest signs of the times. It is also one more proof that the doctrine of evolution was, on his lips, nothing better than a hollow form. Had that doctrine really meant anything to him, he could hardly have blinded himself so completely to the movements which were palpably remoulding the life of Europe during his youth and manhood.

It only remains to ask how far the principle of nationality is identical—as Comte, apart from its alleged abuses, seems to have assumed that it is—with that of humanity, and how far it is distinct. Like the principle of humanity, it is a form of public spirit. Like humanity, it draws the individual out of himself, binds him to other individuals, and gives them common interests, common ideals, common traditions and a common or corporate life. Here, however, the resemblance ends. The ideals of nationality are less ethereal than those of humanity; they are also less vague. While the latter appeal only to the few, the former find their way, in one shape or another, to the heart of all. It is quite true that, for this very reason, they are more capable of being perverted or abused. Deep down in the very heart of nationality there is an element of exclusiveness, which must inevitably lead to rivalry between one nation and another, and which may lead to ill-feeling and to war. But can it be argued that the world could be carried on without this exclusiveness, or that its disappearance—attended, as it would necessarily be, with a corresponding diminution of energy and enterprise—would not bring with it far more of loss than gain? And what could possibly make amends for the weakening of public spirit which must infallibly result from the decay or extinction of the only form of it ever likely to find acceptance with the generality of mankind? The only reasonable course is to take the principle of nationality, with all its imperfections on its head, and endeavour to reduce them within the narrowest possible bounds.

After all, the one serious abuse to which nationality is liable is the constant incitement which it offers to war. That is bad enough, truly. But much has already been done to stir the good sense and conscience of men against this iniquity. And, mistaken though Comte was in supposing the goal to be already reached, it is perhaps no dream to believe that the courage of the world will one day succeed in reaching it. It is better that a blessing even so great as this should be won slowly, and patriotism be left unimpaired, than that an attempt, which after all must prove a vain attempt, should be made to snatch it instantly by the destruction of all that gives to patriotism its significance and force. The principle of humanity may do infinitely much to refine patriotism and to enlarge

it; <sup>1</sup> but to fill the place of patriotism is altogether beyond its power.

Comte's inability to see this was due to the initial flaw in his conception of the relation between the part and the whole, between the individual and the community. The individual is to him a mere blank, an 'abstraction.' So also is the community. The former is narrowed into an industrial machine; the latter swollen, till it embraces the whole of mankind. This whole, in its turn, is filled with a content purely abstract: industrialism, without the play of individual energies and individual ambitions which are the essence of its life; an abstract of the abstract sciences, without the free enquiry on which they absolutely depend; the Grand Being, the Grand Fetish, the Grand Medium, and the other phantoms of the positivist Pantheon. And this content is forced upon the individual, with no alternative save that of utter emptiness; that is, upon conditions which destroy the very nature of individuality.

How, with these manifold and fatal flaws, can we account for the undoubted hold which the Comtist system has taken upon so many acute and meditative minds? The answer is that, with all his shortcomings, Comte was master of some vital truths the neglect of which had for nearly two centuries wrought havoc on the political thought, and even on the political practice, of the Western world. Such was the perception that the truths of science must have some bearing, however remote and however difficult to define, upon the active, no less than on the speculative, life of man. Such was the belief that the present state of a given society is conditioned not only by its surrounding circumstances but by its past. Such, above all, was the conviction that the individual cannot be abstracted from the community, but is what he is—morally, intellectually and spiritually—as a member of the community where he is born and bred.

It is true that the more important of these doctrines, the two latter ones, had been stated in a less questionable form and with greater force by Burke and by the generation of thinkers who succeeded him in Germany. It is true also that, drawn as they were from different (and even opposite) regions of thought—the one from the region of natural science, the other two mainly from that of morals and philosophy—these doctrines were never blended by Comte into a consistent whole. But it is no less true that Comte's statement of them is free, on the one hand, from the restrictions of local circumstance and historical accident which have made the writings of Burke almost a closed book upon the continent; and that, on the other hand, it is free from the specula-

[<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps well to remember that this was written before the establishment of the League of Nations.]

tive obscurity, if also from the speculative completeness which, to the majority of men, will always form an impassable barrier to the study of the German philosophers. It is also true that, having gained the ear of his generation as a man of science, he kept it in the very different character of prophet and apostle.

It must be remembered, further, that the very variety of the sources from which Comte drew riveted the attention of men in a degree which no specialist, above all no philosopher, can hope to rival. Comte has been accepted—on grounds, doubtless, inadequate enough—as the accredited mouthpiece of the scientific method and the scientific spirit. He has also been accepted as a past master in subjects so diverse as human history, as ‘social science,’ and as religion. These are all subjects of the weightiest moment; nor has their importance ever been felt more keenly than at the present day. And to each one of them Comte has contributed something which, if inconclusive or even misleading in itself, has at least done men the service of compelling them to think. His greatness lies neither in the speculative grasp of the unity which underlies all subjects, nor in the mastery of any one. It lies rather in the power of making one subject converge upon another and so obtaining hints and sidelights from each for the benefit of the rest. It is a power often confounded with the true speculative instinct, such as was possessed, for instance, by Hegel and by Kant. That, however, is a mistake. At bottom the two qualities differ as widely as it is possible to conceive. Comte was without the one; but he was master of the other in a high degree.

There are two strands of thought, quite distinct in their origin, which meet in the work of Comte. The one is what may be called the decisively ‘positive’ strain; that which starts from the inseparable connection between the social life of man and the natural order of the world, from the necessity of conforming human society to the conditions, physical and moral, by which it is surrounded and out of which it springs. The other is the idealist strain, which in him tended more and more to thrust aside the natural conditions of the corporate life, as they have been historically developed, and to replace them by an Utopia—intellectual, moral and religious—devised by himself and entrusted to the ‘new priesthood’ for its realisation. The one of these is drawn from the world of scientific method and observation, the world of inexorable law; the other from the world of ideas and of spontaneous energy, the world in which the spirit of man is free to construct its own ends and to carve out for itself its own destiny.

Between the two stands the conception of evolution; a conception which seems to have come to Comte mainly from the

world of natural science, but which, at least in his earlier years, he applied with commanding force to the world of man's social and intellectual life. The misfortune is that, in his later years, he should have so conspicuously failed to grasp the true meaning of that conception, and should consequently have been led to give it an application which is no longer an extension, but the direct contradiction, of that with which he started.

In his earlier work he had reduced the initiative of man within the narrowest limits. Man is little more than the last link in the chain of Nature; the subject of laws—partly physical, partly moral and intellectual—which he has not created and which he has little power to modify or direct. Comte may, at this stage, have allowed too little to the originative faculty, which is the very essence of the human will; it is, indeed, certain that he did so. But evolution, if it is to mean anything, must carry with it certain limitations on the absolute freedom of the will. It must impose certain determinations on that which we instinctively conceive of as determined purely by itself. And it is the merit of Comte, in the positive stage of his teaching, to have recognised this with only too much of unreserve. At that time he strained every nerve to apply both the results and the methods of science to those of man's political and social life. And the logical consequence of this was to bring that life within the region of law and, in particular, the law of evolution.

In his later years, however, Comte threw himself into the opposite extreme. He did his utmost to undo that which had been the main achievement of his earlier life. The reign of law is overthrown. The work of evolution, the natural operation of existing circumstance and historical antecedent, is violently broken. The 'organism,' slowly built up by the silent play of complex causes, is replaced by an artificial fabric which Comte professes to found upon the inherent needs and instincts of human nature, but in the construction of which he discards every single test demanded in his earlier enquiry. Both science and history are trampled under foot. Science, the basis of his earlier work, is now robbed of that freedom which is the very condition of its being. The historical development of the past is rudely thrust aside; the historical method is reduced to an empty name.

The moral activity of man, almost lost under the iron law of the *Philosophie Positive*, is in the *Politique Positive* released from all limitations, even the most certain and the most salutary. In spite of all protestations to the contrary, Comte shakes off the conditions imposed on that activity alike by Nature and by history. His ideal State has no reference to the ordinary instincts of mankind, nor to the century for which it was professedly framed. It

belongs in part to the Middle Ages, in part to the world of Utopias and dreams.

It is doubtless true that the germ of the later tendency is to be traced even in the earlier work of Comte. It would be strange if it were not so. But it is impossible to compare the general tenor of the one period with that of the other, and not be convinced that there is a deep-rooted opposition between them. According to the one, man is part of the order of Nature; his first duty is to study the law of Nature, not indeed for the sake of any positive guidance it may offer, but with a view to avoiding any temptation to depart from it in the management of his own moral and social life. According to the other, he is in part independent of the order of Nature; in part, incapable of learning it.

The same opposition reappears in the successive forms assumed by Comte's conception of the State. According to the one, the functions of government are reduced practically to nothing. They are barely more than to register the automatic changes through which the 'social organism' is continually passing. According to the other, the whole life of the community is absorbed in the government; to speak Comte's language, in the spiritual power. Saving the 'sacred right of insurrection,' no initiative is allowed to the general body of the citizens. They are taken out of the natural order of development. They have no longer even an unconscious life of their own. They are subjected, body and soul, to the divine right of the new priesthood.

The former conception is based on the idea of evolution. It is coloured throughout by the results and methods of natural science. In one word, it is essentially positive. The latter conception, when fairly sifted, is seen to involve the rejection both of scientific methods and of scientific results. It is incompatible with any form, however attenuated, of evolution. It is, in the worst sense of the terms, metaphysical and theological. The agnostic theory, on which it is ultimately founded, is as metaphysical as any of the theories which it is intended to destroy. The new priesthood, the priesthood of agnosticism, is as arbitrary as any priesthood of implicit faith; and as much the offspring, though a bastard offspring, of theological ideas.

Thus two distinct, and indeed opposite, orders of thought are embodied in successive layers of the work of Comte. On the one hand, he makes appeal to those who believe it possible to apply the results and methods of natural science to the political and social life of man. On the other hand, he is the apostle of those who hold that, in his corporate as in his individual life, man is a thing apart from the world of Nature; that to construct his own ideals is his first instinct and to realise them his first duty. He was, in fact,

successively the champion of the 'positive' and of the idealist conception of the State. And he was the champion of each in its most exaggerated form.

The tendency of the *Philosophie Positive* is to lay extravagant stress on the force of circumstance and antecedent. That of the *Politique Positive* is to rob both one and the other of all serious significance. The tendency of the *Philosophie Positive* is to make each generation the slave of those that have gone before. That of the *Politique Positive* is to make each in turn the point of a new departure, conditioned by nothing that is past, and consequently, though the consequence is naturally not admitted by Comte, itself conditioning nothing that is to follow. In the intention of Comte, the new priesthood was to be 'the fair beginning of a time,' and of all future time. But it is an intention without logic. 'The priest who slew the slayer' may, by the same rule, 'himself be slain.' The Utopia of Positivism is the panacea of one generation; that of Marx or the International may, with just as much reason, be the panacea of the next.

The former tendency won him the support of those who wish to reduce the functions of legislation—and, except as a restraining force, of government also—to a minimum; who believe in the principle of *laissez-faire*—not indeed because 'the people are always in the right,' but because their successive errors, if left to run their natural course, will eventually tend to correct each other; and because, so far as this is not the case, to strive against them is to struggle against a stream which no human power can resist. The latter tendency rallied round him not only a large section of those who hold that every civic community should be based on a definite principle of religious and political thought, but also those who demand that the government of each community should use its powers to enforce that principle by every means at its command; that it should act not only as instrument, nor even only as moderator, but as guide, and even as dictator, to the whole body of citizens. In other words, Comte was, at different periods, the accepted master both of those who embrace the principle of liberty and of those who embrace the principle of authority; both of those who are for spontaneous development from beneath and of those who are for calculated dictation from above.

The strange thing is, not that he should have shifted his own position, even to an extent so startling as this, without perceiving it; but that he should have drawn after him to his new position so large a number of those who sincerely believed themselves to be still faithful to the old. It is not that the Utopia of his closing years should have made so many converts; but that they should have supposed an Utopia of any sort to be compatible with the



evolutionary doctrine of his beginnings. That is a paradox which no logic can account for. It must be set down to the personal—we may fairly say, the sacerdotal—ascendancy of Comte himself, and to the prevailing fashion of the times in which he lived. So strong was the spell he had cast on his earlier followers, those who hailed his application of evolution to the political and social life of man, that they largely continued to follow him, even when, for all practical purposes, he had thrown the doctrine of evolution to the winds. So deep was the hold which evolution had taken on the imaginations of men that they still clung to it in theory, even when the belief which really stirred their hearts was one utterly inconsistent with its practical application. This will hardly seem strange to a generation which has seen the same doctrine pressed bodily into the service of Christian Apologetics.

The one point in which Comte throughout remained consistent was the belief that not the individual, but the community, is the starting-point of all sound political theory, as of all sound political endeavour. This, in all probability, is the one article of his faith which will permanently survive. This, and the conviction—so forcibly urged in his earlier, so strangely abandoned in his later, writings—that the growth of man's corporate life, like that of the world of Nature, is the work of gradual development; that the single man or the single generation of men can do little to alter its direction, and still less to remould the vital principles of its being; in one word, that each nation moves by its own law of evolution; and that this law is determined in part by natural aptitude and character, in part by physical conditions, in part—and, of all elements, this is the most important—by the long training of the past.

By such a conception—whatever Comte himself may have thought of the matter—deliberate and conscious change is by no means excluded. Only, like that which is unpremeditated and unconscious, it must be of slow growth. Before it can tell on the corporate character, it must be sustained not for one generation, but for many.

That, in his earlier and happier view, Comte was willing to recognise any such formative energy as inherent in the corporate life of man, is not to be maintained. And when in his later years he strove to repair the error, the zeal with which he went to work was so intemperate as to make the remedy far worse than the disease. In correcting what was false he swept away also what was true and fruitful in the doctrine from which he started. He was not content merely to find room for the spontaneity of each successive generation; he asserted it in a form so absolute as logically to exclude all conceivable determination of it, either by

physical circumstance or by historical antecedent. He was not content merely to limit the despotism of evolutionary law; he never rested until he had destroyed its working altogether.

The next—and, for us, the last—stage in the task of political philosophy was to retrace the false step thus inconsiderately taken by Comte; to undo his later work; and to start once more from the point reached in his earlier speculations. It was to reconcile the idea of evolution and historical law which Comte (unconsciously enough) had inherited from Hegel, with that belief in the indestructible freedom of man which was the inspiration of Rousseau. It was to harmonise the faith in individual responsibility proclaimed by the latter, with that faith in the sovereignty of the community, as determining the will of the individual and itself determined by the ordered progress of humanity, which Comte—under a form differing by no means always for the better—held in common with the former. This was the task attempted, and in large measure accomplished, by Mazzini.

## CHAPTER VI

### MAZZINI<sup>1</sup>

FIFTY years lay between Mazzini and the Revolution ; a time short in itself, but long enough to have changed the whole face of political speculation. Within those years the supremacy of the individual had been discredited and overthrown. The State, the nation, humanity, had been exalted in his place. The current which had threatened to sweep Europe into anarchy had been violently reversed. The danger now was from the opposite quarter. It was that the regions reclaimed by the energy of the individual and set apart for his service, should once more be lost to mankind under stress of a blind revulsion towards authority;

<sup>1</sup> [In this chapter the author's references to Mazzini's writings are made to *Opere di G. Mazzini*, 18 vols., 1861-91 (sometimes, in library catalogues and elsewhere, described as *Scritti*, not *Opere*).

In the text of the chapter the translations of passages in these writings are by the author. Where, in his notes, he quotes the Italian without translating, a translation has been substituted.

The following books contain translations of some of the writings:

(1) *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, 6 volumes, 1864-70 (Smith, Elder & Co., now Murray). Vols. ii., iii., v. are out of print.

(2) *Joseph Mazzini: a Memoir by E. A. V.* [Madame Venturi], 1875 (Henry S. King). This contains translations, generally the same as those in the *Life and Writings*, of *Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe* and *The Duties of Man*, but is out of print.

(3) *Essays by Joseph Mazzini, most of them translated for the first time by Thomas Okey*, 1894 (Dent). This contains, among other writings, two of those referred to by Vaughan, but not *The Duties of Man*.

(4) *The Duties of Man, and other Essays by Joseph Mazzini*, 1907 (Dent). This contains, besides *The Duties of Man*, five papers, reprinted from Okey, and an important paper not referred to in this chapter.

The translations in (3) and (4) of writings already translated in (1) and (2) are new. These four publications are referred to in the chapter as, respectively, *Writings*, E. A. V., Okey, and Dent.

*Mazzini*, by Bolton King (Dent, 1902), contains, in Appendix B, a bibliography of Mazzini's writings.—A. C. B.]

the authority no longer of a ruling caste but of the community or the race.

That the State is paramount to the individual had been established by Burke. That the corporate life is stronger than the individual, that it controls not merely the outward acts of the individual but his very will and reason at a thousand points, had been proved by a long line of thinkers from Vico to Hegel. Is there, then, no sphere of energy that the individual can claim entirely for himself; is there no region of thought and action where none but he can intrude; are there no rights which he is entitled to guard against all challenge?—these were the questions which had once seemed to be set at rest for all time, but which the history of the past fifty years now compelled men to ask themselves afresh. These were the questions which Mazzini set himself to answer. And though his answer may be more positive, more favourable to the individual, than the truth will altogether warrant, it has beyond question done much to correct exaggerations in the opposite direction. And that the doubt was raised by one so profoundly convinced that the corporate life is that in which alone the faculties of the individual can grow to their full measure, is in itself a guarantee that the solution can hardly be very seriously at fault.

It is significant that Mazzini took up the problem, not where Comte, but where Hegel had left it. Of Comte there is, so far as I am aware, no mention in his writings. Of the theorists subsequent to Hegel it is only the socialists and the communists with whom he reckons. It may be that he did not foresee the vogue which Comte's doctrines were destined to win, at any rate in this country. It may be that he was impatient of the capricious fancies which deface the later versions of the positive philosophy. In any case it is clear that the factors which actually lay before Mazzini, the factors which it was his lifelong endeavour to harmonise, were not the Social Statics of Comte and his Social Dynamics, not the agnostic philosophy and the religion of humanity; but, on the one hand, the doctrine of historical evolution, as expounded by Hegel, and, on the other hand, the doctrine of individual Rights, as formulated by Rousseau, as modified by subsequent theorists, as embodied in the acts and institutions of 1789. To preserve all that is vital in the former, without sacrificing that spontaneity of individual thought and individual energy which is the essence of the latter, this was the problem that as thinker—and, it may justly be said, as man of action also—he was called upon to solve.

In examining the opinions of Mazzini, it is fair to remember that none of his writings is cast in scientific form. All of them were written in hot haste. All were intended for readers little

apt to follow a long train of speculative thought. All were designed not merely to convince the intellect, but to touch the springs of action; not merely to win assent, but to make disciples. In such writings it is vain to look for the smooth order of a philosophic treatise. There is an eagerness in the argument and a sustained passion in the language, which would startle us in a work intended for the lecture-room or the study, but which are fitting enough in what might have been public speeches and are, in fact, of the nature of General Epistles. Mazzini's work as thinker, though eighteen volumes bear witness to its energy and fruitfulness, was, in truth, but an interlude in a life of incessant action; a mere relaxation in his unwearied labours as apostle of nationality, as conspirator-general in the service of Italy and the whole of Europe.

All this, it need hardly be said, imposes a special difficulty upon the student. Mazzini had thought intently on the problems of political philosophy and those deeper problems—metaphysical, moral and religious—which lie behind them. He had wrestled with them, as he alone can wrestle who is daily forced to put the faith that is in him to the test of want and danger and mortal disappointment.<sup>1</sup> But his thoughts lie scattered over a wide surface; and the very intensity of his personality makes it hard to be confident that we have seized each of them in its due order or its due proportion to the rest.

There are, however, two writings which stand out above the others, and from which the main outlines of his teaching may, with reasonable completeness, be pieced together. These are *Faith and the Future*, which belongs to 1835; and *The Duties of Man*, originally composed in 1844 and 1858, and revised finally in 1860.<sup>2</sup> To these may be added *I Sistemi e la Democrazia*, written immediately after the fall of the Roman Republic in 1849, and a series of papers written during the two closing years of his life (1870–72), and published in the last three volumes of his collected *Works* (xvi.-xviii.). Few things are more striking than the courage with which, when his hopes of an Italian Republic had been dashed finally to the ground, he set himself once more to the task of literary labour, which, in another form, had been the

<sup>1</sup> Mazzini has left an impressive account of the struggle in which the early years of his exile were passed: *Opere*, vol. v. pp. 207-18; *Writings*, iii. 161-75; and (in part) E. A. V., 50-9.

<sup>2</sup> The former is printed in *Opere*, vol. v.; *Writings*, iii.; Okey and Dent; the latter in *Opere*, vol. xviii.; *Writings*, iv.; E. A. V.; Dent. The division in the latter comes between chaps. iv. and v., the more recent part beginning with 'Duties towards the Country.' *I Sistemi e la Democrazia* appears in *Opere*, vol. vii.; and (as *Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe*) in *Writings*, vi.; E. A. V.

cherished dream of his youth. There has been nothing like it since Milton.

From what side, then, does Mazzini approach the theory of politics, and what is the new shape that he gives to it?

From the first, he rejects the assumption—an assumption unquestioned before Burke, first seriously shaken by Hegel and still, with many, a cherished article of the faith—that it is a problem of unvarying elements. From the first he recognises it to be one which changes with each period of man's development, moving with the progressive movement of his convictions concerning his own destiny and his relation to God. From the first, therefore, he denies that the theory of Rights can be a final answer to the problem. From the first he asserts that no conceivable answer can, in the nature of things, be more than tentative and provisional. Complete, it may be, for its own period, it must of necessity be inadequate for that which follows. The one unvarying condition of the problem is to be progressive, and therefore variable. And no answer, which, like the theory of individual Rights, assumes it to be stationary, can claim to have mastered the first elements of the question which it professes to decide. Such a theory may be, and is, a necessary prelude to the attainment of the truth. It has elaborated one of the elements which go to constitute the truth. But from attainment itself, or even from that distant approach to attainment which is all that lies within the reach of man, it is disqualified by its very assumption of finality.

This, sufficiently for the moment, indicates the method which Mazzini brings to the enquiry. It is the method of Hegel, but applied in a more concrete form, with a surer grasp of historical fact, and with at least equal rigour and consistency. By this method the whole subsequent enquiry is dominated and inspired. Throughout, it is the task of Mazzini to show that it is not merely man's theories of political life, but the very facts and ideas which constitute that life, that are subject to variation: it should be said rather, to continuous progress. It is his further task to show that no stage in that progress, however far mankind may have passed beyond it, can ever cease to live in their experience; that each stage of it reappears, though changed by changed relations, as an indispensable element, in all the stages which succeed.

Thus, marshalling the facts in the largest possible masses, Mazzini divides the whole history of man's political energy into two main periods: the period of individuality, and the period ruled by the conception of corporate activity and of duty. The former dates from the earliest attempt deliberately made by man to organise his political life in accordance with a fixed principle; that is, from the republics of ancient Greece and, subsequently, of Rome. It closes with the

French Revolution. The latter gives earnest of its coming during the struggles which immediately followed the Revolution, and even in certain episodes of the Revolution itself. It has already done much to change both the outward form of political action and its inward spirit. But even now it can hardly be said to have won its way fully to acceptance. It is still struggling in the throes of birth.

The dominant conception of the earlier period, as has been said, was individuality. And that, like all other seminal principles, is one which admits of various applications. Thus the heritage given to the world by Greece and Rome was that of individual liberty. From liberty Christianity, while for the first time proclaiming the religious formula of the whole period, drew the inference of equality; equality, in the first instance, before the eye of God. The Reformation reaffirmed, and above all in the order of religious thought, the principle of liberty. The Revolution, which resumes and sums up the whole preceding era, deepened and strengthened both the principles hitherto asserted, applying them, as they had hardly been applied before, to politics. It also added a third, and kindred, principle—one already foreshadowed, in a more abstract and general form, by the teaching of Christianity—the principle of brotherhood.

The following passages will serve to illustrate the above sketch of Mazzini's philosophy of history. 'The polytheistic religions'—the religions of Greece and Rome—'affirmed *man* and the spontaneity which resides in man. They took from his shoulders the burden with which pantheism had crushed him. They discerned the truth that, in the providential design of the Universe, one part is entrusted to him. But they did not succeed in defining it. Ignorant of the unity of life, and of its two manifestations—individual and collective—in the nature of man, they only recognised the former of these; they concentrated all their labours upon the individual; and in the individual they saw nothing but his inward, subjective existence; they saw nothing but his *liberty*. Without any conception of man's mission, uncertain as to the end to pursue and the method to follow, they allowed themselves to be stopped short by an insuperable barrier, by the dominance of an universal fact, the fact of inequality. This fact they accepted, and gave the sanction of an irrefragable dogma to the double nature of man. The idea of liberty was developed admirably by Greece and Rome; but only for one class of men. By decree of birth or conquest, the slave stood face to face with the citizen.

'The Christian epoch came to complete the work begun by Polytheism. It regarded the individual in his other aspect; in his outward existence, the life of objective relations. Hence its principal task was to elaborate the idea of *equality*. Judaism had

already founded the vital dogma of the unity of God. Christianity made this its own and, carrying it a step further, denied that it was the exclusive privilege of a chosen people, declared that it was the right of all peoples. The God of Moses was the God of Israel, of the nation. The God of Christianity was the God of all men, who, by a necessary consequence, are brothers in him. . . . Further than this Christianity did not, and could not, go. The conception of life then dominant ignored the collective being of humanity; the law of progress which governs it; the historical tradition which reveals that law and teaches its method; the solidarity which exists between the generations past, present and to come; the unity which binds earth to heaven, the actual to the ideal, the finite to the infinite. Christianity had aspirations towards the future more powerful than some admit. It fostered a worship of the ideal, which may be seen in the Art as in all the other Christian activities of the first thirteen or fourteen centuries. But, placed between an end boundless and indefinitely remote, such as is salvation or perfection, and the powers of the individual—weak, variable, isolated, ineffective, operative only for the short space of a lifetime—it was inevitably drawn to two consequences. It had to admit its inability to solve the problem with the human elements placed by existing thought at its disposal. And it was compelled to resort to the intervention of a higher power, independent of all law, in order to overcome the immense disproportion between the end and the means by which it was to be attained. Hence the divinity assigned to Jesus. Hence the doctrine of grace, of contempt for this world, of the insufficiency of works. Hence the constant aspiration towards heaven, which prompted to ceaseless prayer, to isolation, to renunciation of the visible world; which discouraged association, the progressive transformation of the elements that constitute our life; and which led men to sacrifice all endeavour to realise whatever of the ideal can be realised here below. Hence the divorce between the visible world and the invisible, between man's life on earth and a reign of justice and love to be established only in heaven. Christianity accepted the idea of liberty elaborated by Paganism, added to it the idea of equality, and preached charity to the brethren. But it was a liberty purely spiritual; an equality of souls in the sight of God; a charity to be exercised only between individual and individual—a consequence of the renunciation of the goods of this world rather than an attempt to suppress the occasions of pain and evil. The religion of the Christians was not life itself, but a compensation held out for a life that must perforce be accepted in a world which remains as it was from the beginning. . . .

'Sixteen centuries had exhausted the strength of the Christian



synthesis. It was necessary that the spirit of man should begin to move towards another and wider synthesis; necessary, therefore, that an emphatic assertion of the individual should be made, and of that right of free examination without which every attempt to pass the limits of the old synthesis must of necessity be baffled. Protestantism was, unconsciously, such an assertion. And this was its one mission in the world. But it did not pass the limits of the epoch from which it sprang. The sovereignty of the individual, arbitrarily restricted within the bounds laid down by the Bible, was its last word, re-echoed in the Art, the Economics, the Politics which it inaugurated.

'After two further centuries of dissolution the epoch of the individual was effete and moribund. France took on herself to conclude it; to sum up its conquests, principles and characteristics; to translate them into practice, in the sphere of political life. Did the Revolution pass the limits of the old era? Did it initiate a new one?'<sup>1</sup>

This question is answered in an earlier writing, *The Condition and Future of Europe*, published in the *Westminster Review* of April 1852.

'Philosophically speaking, the French Revolution was not a program, but rather a *résumé*, a summing-up. It did not initiate an epoch; it concluded one. It did not give to the world a new idea, the unknown quantity of an historical era. It rather transplanted to the ground of practice, to the sphere of the political ordering of society, a formula which contains within itself the conquests of four-and-twenty centuries, the vast ideas elaborated in the moral sphere through two worlds of history, the pagan and the Christian world. It was, so to speak, a general rendering of accounts. The Revolution took from the pagan world the assertion of liberty, of the sovereignty of the individual. It took from the Christian world the assertion of equality; that is, of the liberty of all—a logical consequence of the natural unity of the human race. It took also the declaration of fraternity—a consequence of the Christian formula "All men are sons of God." And it maintained—here lies the great service it did to Europe—that it was man's duty to reduce these assertions to fact in this life.

'Beyond these limits it never passed. In every summing-up of the progress already achieved we can indeed trace the germ of the progress of the future. Accordingly the Revolution was traversed by many aspirations towards the idea of association, of a common aim, of collective responsibility, of a religious transformation, such as dominates all the forces which operate in our own

<sup>1</sup> *The French Revolution of 1789: Opere*, xvi. pp. 69-72 (written in 1871); Okey, 197-200; Dent, 263-6.

day. But in its official acts, in its development taken as a whole, in its most characteristic manifestations, it never overstepped the circle of progress already completed in the sphere of reason, the emancipation of the individual. Hence it was that, after having condensed its inmost thought in a declaration of the rights of the individual, it was possible for the Revolution to sum itself up, to give itself complete expression, in a single man, Napoleon. The idea of Right, that is, of the individual asserting himself, was its life and soul and strength. The idea of Duty, that is, of the individual subordinated to the collective will, was not the thought which guided it. Duty, for it, was the necessity of fighting for the Rights of each; and it was nothing more. In other words, the Revolution put duty in bondage to Right. It was not aware of that which we know now, that there is no such thing as a Right except in so far as it rises from the fulfilment of a duty.<sup>1</sup> The Revolution, in its distinctive action, could never rise to a declaration of Principles. In spite of its efforts to transcend these limits, its definition of life was always the materialist definition: the right to material well-being. And so it remains. Yet, in spite of this, Europe—consciously or unconsciously, it matters not—has been stirred from end to end by another and a more religious idea: Life is a mission. This represents a series of duties, of sacrifices, to be undertaken for the sake of others, with a view to the moral progress of the future.

France, by the Revolution, has inaugurated the practical application to the world of politics of the truths taught by Christianity in the kingdom of the spirit. Like Christianity, she has said, *Behold the man*. She has placed the individual in the fullness of his liberty face to face with his enemies. She has fought and conquered for him. The work of Luther in the sphere of politics—this is her glory and her strength.<sup>2</sup>

From these and other passages it appears that, within the bounds of each period taken singly, there is a continuous progress; and that this progress consists not in abandoning any of the successive applications given to the ruling conception of the period, because it has ceased to be the newest fashion of the hour; but in

<sup>1</sup> Compare the following passage from *The Duties of Man*: 'When I say that the consciousness of their *rights* does not suffice to enable men to effect an important and lasting improvement, I am not calling on you to renounce these rights. I am saying only that they are nothing but a consequence of *duties* fulfilled, and that, to gain the former, we must begin with the latter' (*Opere*, xviii. p. 16; *Writings*, iv. 224; E. A. V., 274; Dent, 16).

<sup>2</sup> *Opere*, viii. pp. 187-8; *Writings*, vi. 234-6.

extending and deepening the earlier applications, while widening and reinforcing them by fresh ones. The same thing, though of necessity in a different way, is true of the progress from the one period to the other. Not only, as will more fully be stated later, does the dominant idea of the earlier period still continue to work, and even to receive further applications, after the later period has opened; but it continues, and will always continue, to be an integral element in the ideal which, either now or at any future time, is destined to rule the thoughts and action of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in Mazzini's view, the dominant note of the earlier period, that which closes and is summed up in the Revolution, is individuality; that of the later period, the period now in course, is the 'social idea,' the constant striving after 'association.' But in that later period individuality, though it has ceased to be dominant, neither can, nor ought to, be discarded. And in the same way, as will appear hereafter, throughout the earlier period the idea of association, though constantly checked and thwarted, was still powerful enough to modify, alike in the general course of events and at critical turning-points of man's history, the unrestrained action of individuality. The conception, which did not fully formulate itself till the beginning of the nineteenth century, had yet, in a blind and imperfect fashion, made itself felt throughout the previous history of man. The opposite conception, though it has now—and rightly—lost its absolute sovereignty, will never cease to be of cardinal importance in shaping the efforts of man towards association.

'The revelation of Truth is progressive; and, consequently, the two instruments by which we are enabled to discern the truth must themselves be capable of continuous transformation and improvement. We cannot abandon them without condemning ourselves to eternal darkness. We cannot abandon even one of them, or subordinate it to the other, without robbing ourselves, beyond recall, of half our strength. Individuality, the appeal to the individual conscience alone, leads to anarchy. The social idea, the reliance only on tradition, without a constant effort to interpret that tradition by the intuition of the individual conscience and so impel men towards the goal of the future, leads to despotism and stagnation.'<sup>2</sup>

Compare this statement with corresponding statements to be found in the work of Comte. It is not only truer in itself.

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, the criticism of Communism in *I sistemi e la democrazia*, *Opere*, vii. pp. 335-45; *Writings*, vi. 181-6, 195-203; E. A. V., 236-40, 242-9. This, in itself, is enough to show how wide is the distance between Mazzini and the Utopians.

<sup>2</sup> *Opere*, viii. p. 200; *Writings*, vi. 248-9.

It rests also on a broader, and more consistent, idea of progress. The progress of Comte, when all is said and done, is not continuous. Each step in advance involves not the continuation, but the negation, of that which has gone before. The attainment of one stage, so far from being carried forward, is abandoned in the next. The theological interpretation of the world is cancelled by the metaphysical; and that, in its turn, is cancelled, still more decisively, by the positive. It was the boast of Comte to have banished 'the absolute' from his conclusions. It is the more unfortunate that he should have allowed it to reign without challenge in his methods. For it is there precisely that its exclusion, so questionable in the conclusions of philosophy, is without doubt to be desired.

The result of Comte's procedure is that, in his hands, progress, so far as it continues to have any significance at all, becomes a mere succession of disconnected, spasmodic leaps; in other words, that it loses all that is distinctive of its nature. And this, as we have seen, paves the way but too surely for its ultimate surrender. There is the further result that the two earlier stages in the evolution of human thought—the theological and the metaphysical,—when they have done their work in preparation for the final disclosure of the positive faith, or rather in marking time till its appearance, are summarily cashiered. They are not allowed, in however modified a shape, to have any further influence upon the thoughts or ideals of men. And how disastrous were the effects of this upon the conclusions, as well as upon the methods, of Comte's system, has already been sufficiently shown. Both theology and metaphysics, debarred from all direct and open expression, crept in furtively by a back door. Banished as truth, they returned under the fictions of the Grand Being, the Grand Medium and the Grand Fetish.

From these and the like absurdities Mazzini, by returning to the sane method of Hegel, was necessarily saved. Progress, in fact no less than in name, was consistently maintained; and, in the fullest sense of the word, it was continuous. Each step in the development of man's intellectual and social life, once gained, is gained for ever. There is no breach between the present of man and his remotest past.

The secret of this superiority is to be found in two facts. On the one hand, the analysis of Mazzini is less abstract than that of Comte. The individual and the community, the moral and social consequences of Paganism and Christianity, have a more concrete significance and a closer bearing upon the matter in hand than the purely intellectual conceptions of 'positivism' and metaphysics and theology. On the other hand, Mazzini saw, as Comte emphatically did not see, that the ideas which have

successively moulded the common life of man have done so precisely because they are grounded on the deepest, and therefore the most permanent, instincts of his nature. To him, accordingly, it was clear at a glance that such instincts cannot be, in the strict sense of the term, successive, that they cannot be mutually exclusive. He knew that each of them must always have found, and that it will never cease to find, effective utterance in action; that, just as the sense of corporate life worked with an energy unperceived and unrealised, but none the less far-reaching, during the era of individuality, so the sense of individual liberty and individual rights works, and must continue to work, though doubtless with lessened powers, even now that its sole sovereignty is passed away. Thanks to his grasp of this truth, he was quicker than other men to discover what, as a matter of fact, are the ideas which have shaped the political life of man. He was also guided, as though by an infallible instinct, to the true nature of progress.

Armed with this method, Mazzini at once forces his way to the heart of the problem. There are—the foregoing enquiry has shown—two elements whose working can be traced in the common life of man, as hitherto developed. These are the element of individuality and the element of corporate life or, as Mazzini commonly calls it, ‘association.’ What is it, he asks, that each of them has contributed to the history of man? What is the part each has played in his moral and political growth?

In the world of morals—that is, of action considered as a matter of purely personal concern—individuality has given birth to the sense of right and wrong; and, therefore, to the conception of duty, as that which commands the one and sternly forbids the other. In one word, it has given to man the faculty we know as conscience. In the world of politics—that is, of action considered not as self-regarding but as affecting and affected by others—it has given birth to the conception of rights. Every man—not only I, but every other man—is conscious of certain claims that he has upon the action, or the forbearance, of others. These claims, negative or positive—and they are, in fact, negative still more than positive—constitute his rights. They mark the limits beyond which others may not justly go in their dealings with me. They also mark—and it is the undying service of Christianity to have laid stress on this—the limits beyond which I may not justly go in my dealings with others. It follows that the conception of Rights, in the political sense, no less than that of Right, in the moral sense, involves—though, in this case, indirectly—the idea of duty. And that, in its turn, involves, as the conscience of mankind has commonly held it to involve, the idea of God.

Thus individuality contributes the first, the more primitive,

of the two elements of which the life of man, both moral and political, is ultimately framed; the conception of moral duty and that of political Right. It is true that this statement must be carefully guarded—more carefully than Mazzini is commonly at the pains to do—or it may easily be taken to mean more than is actually the case. In the first place, it is to be noticed that, strictly speaking, neither of these two conceptions can be defined as the work of individuality, and of that alone. Duty, even in its most elementary form, is not merely self-regarding. It is not merely my duty towards God; it is my duty towards my neighbour also. In other words, it outsteps the limits of individuality. It implies a bond, which the will of the individual did not create and which it has no power to abolish, between one individual and another. It therefore brings us to the threshold of a conception which is hardly to be distinguished from that of corporate life. It involves an anticipation, though doubtless a most imperfect one, of the second element, the element of association. The same is true, in a yet greater degree, of the conception of political Right.

And in the second place, which is yet more important, neither the conception of duty nor the conception of Right is, at this stage, anything more than a blank form. To give to that form a definite matter, to fill it with a specific content—with specific duties in the one case, with specific rights in the other—is a task which lies, and must always lie, beyond the powers of bare individuality. It is one which can only be performed with the aid, if not by the sole strength, of the community. The failure of Kant to deduce a detailed code of duties from the blank form of the ‘categorical imperative,’ his inability to base the specific duties of the moral law purely upon the workings of the individual conscience, has shown once for all that any such attempt is foredoomed to disappointment. Where Kant failed, what other man can reasonably hope to succeed? And the same thing, *mutatis mutandis*, is true, in politics, of specific rights. The blank form, the abstract idea, of Right may be due in the first instance to the individual. But the filling-up of that form, the concrete application of that idea, must come, at least in part, from the instinctive reason of the community. On this point, though not entirely free from hesitation, Mazzini speaks far more clearly than on the former.

It is a common belief that the law of God, the sum of the particular duties which each man is called on to fulfil, is written by nature, by the finger of God himself, on the heart or conscience of the individual. ‘True,’ replies Mazzini; ‘if our duties were merely negative, if they merely consisted in not doing evil, in

not injuring our brother men, then, even in the stage of development which the least educated among us has at present reached, perhaps the voice of conscience might suffice us as a guide. We are born with a tendency to good; and each time that we act directly contrary to the moral law, each time that we commit what mankind has agreed to call a crime, there is something in us which condemns us, a cry of rebuke which we may conceal from others, but not from ourselves. Our most important duties, however, are positive. It is not enough to abstain from doing ill; we are bound also to do good. It is not enough to refrain from acting contrary to the law; we are bound to act in furtherance of the law. It is not enough to do our brethren no harm; we are bound to do them good. Too often, throughout the past, the moral law has presented itself to the minds of most men in a form rather negative than positive. Its interpreters have said: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal. Few, or none, have taught the active obligations which rest on man, the duty which binds him to help his fellows, and further the design of God in the creation. This, however, is the first aim of moral action, and the individual, by consulting solely his own conscience, can never attain it.

‘Individual conscience speaks in accordance with the *education*, the tendencies, the habits and passions of the individual. The conscience of the Iroquois speaks a very different language from that of the enlightened European of the present day. The conscience of the free man suggests duties which the conscience of the slave is powerless even to imagine. . . . Evidently, then, the voice of the individual conscience does not suffice, under all conditions, to reveal the moral law. It needs some further guide. Conscience alone may suffice to teach us that a law exists; it cannot teach us what are the duties which that law prescribes.’ It may teach a man that there is a duty of self-sacrifice; but it may often misteach him as to the object for which that self-sacrifice is demanded. ‘Thus it is that, in spite of selfishness, martyrdom has never been banished from the world. But how many martyrs have laid down their lives for imaginary duties, in support of delusions now obvious to all! Conscience, therefore, has need of a guide . . . of a standard to direct and verify its instincts. That standard is twofold: reason and humanity. . . . Now the individual reason can never avail to learn the law of God, unless it seek support in the reason of humanity. Our life is short, our faculties are weak. . . . But God has placed us in presence of a being, whose life is permanent and whose faculties are the sum of all the individual faculties put forth for perhaps four hundred centuries; a being which, in spite of the crimes and errors of

individuals, perpetually advances in wisdom and goodness; a being in whose progress from age to age God is for ever writing a line of his law. 'This being is humanity.'<sup>1</sup>

No less necessary is the conception of corporate life, at least in a rudimentary form, to any concrete application of the idea of Right; though it must be admitted that on this point Mazzini is less explicit. The 'rights' of one age differ from the 'rights' of another, no less than its moral duties. The Iroquois, to take Mazzini's example, will demand something which would altogether have failed to satisfy the disciple of Rousseau. The Declaration of Rights, so far from being for all time and all conditions of men, was, in fact, dictated by the interests of a single section of Frenchmen in the last half of the eighteenth century; perhaps not even a majority of the nation; certainly not the whole. This implies that the standard of rights, like that of duties, varies according to circumstances; and that can only mean that it is set by public opinion, by the 'common sense' of each community. Men measure their rights by their expectations; and their expectations are measured for them largely by custom; that is, by the social ideals of their own day, their own country, and even their own class.

Hence it is, as Mazzini expressly points out, that a struggle, begun in the name of rights, will commonly end in a war of classes. So it was that the political emancipation of the whites in San Domingo led immediately to a revolt of the blacks.<sup>2</sup> So it was that the first two Revolutions in France, revolutions avowedly based on the idea of rights, ended in bettering the condition not of a whole nation, but of the dominant—that is, the middle—class. In such a conflict of interests it is manifest that the only arbiter is brute force; the sword must be called in to cut the knot which Right is powerless to unloose. 'Nothing can hinder men from fighting against Right. Every individual, who feels himself injured by the assertion of it, is entitled to rebel against it. And between the combatants only force, in the last resort, can judge.'<sup>3</sup>

There are, in truth, two alternatives, either of which destroys the self-sufficiency of Right, as a principle flowing purely from the

<sup>1</sup> *Duties of Man Opere*, xviii. pp. 38-41; *Writings*, iv. 251 f.; E. A. V., 295 f.; Dent, 35 f.

<sup>2</sup> 'As the colonists rise on you, the negroes rise on them. 'Troops again—massacre, torture, hanging! These are your rights of men!' Burke, *Reflections: Works*, i. p. 465.

<sup>3</sup> *Faith and the Future: Opere*, v. p. 173; *Writings*, iii. 117; Okey, 65; Dent, 169. Compare *Opere*, xviii. pp. 11-13; and *I sistemi e la democrazia*, *Opere*, vii. pp. 292-305; *Writings*, vi. 126-142; E. A. V., 193-205.



individual. Exclude, so far as it can be excluded, the sense of corporate life and, with it, the sense of common ties and a common duty on which it necessarily depends. In that case, the assertion of Right will end in a clash of interests, possibly a war of classes, which cannot be settled by Right, and which is fatal to its very existence. On the other hand, give to the idea of Right its true significance, furnish it with a full content, apply it to all men without distinction. In that case, you will avowedly have passed beyond the region of individual Right; you will have trespassed on that of corporate activity and of duty.<sup>1</sup> In neither case is it possible altogether to escape from the influence of the community and all that it involves. In the one case, you resort to it for the matter and content of the idea of Right; you do so unconsciously and by implication. In the other case, you draw from it not merely the matter of your rights, but the universality of their application; you do so explicitly and without concealment.

Right, then, in Mazzini's view, is a principle not original but derived. It is not enough to say that it is correlative to duties. It is 'dependent on the fulfilment of duties.'<sup>2</sup> Unless the individual have acknowledged the authority of the State and be willing to pay his obligations in detail, he cannot, either *de facto* or *de jure*, lay any claim to the corresponding rights.

Such a view runs violently counter to current opinion; to the language instinctively used by men of all schools of thought. How, then, we are at once impelled to ask, about personal liberty? How about the right of free speech? Even those rights, it must be answered, the most fundamental it is possible to conceive, are still conditional. By the usage of all nations, they are enjoyed only so long as they are not flagrantly abused. The commission of a crime, even of one involving no injury to others, is enough to deprive a man of the one. An act of libellous or indecent speech, legally brought home to a man, is enough to deprive him, *pro tanto*, of the other. More than this. It is not merely positive breaches of public Right that are punished by the Law. The mere failure to fulfil a civil duty will, in extreme cases, involve penalties hardly, if at all, less severe. A steady refusal to pay taxes or to render military service, in lands where there is a legal obligation to do so, will carry with it at least a fine and, in all probability, a term of imprisonment. Such is the universal practice. Can it be argued that it is intrinsically unjust? And, if not, must it not be admitted that even the most elementary rights are not so absolute as we instinctively suppose; that Right, as Mazzini urges, is, in fact, 'dependent on the fulfilment of duties'?

<sup>1</sup> *Opere*, vii. pp. 298-300; *Writings*, vi. 133-6; E. A. V., 198-201.

<sup>2</sup> See the passages cited above, p. 258; *Opere*, viii. pp. 187-8; xviii. p. 16.

Yet the question returns: Does not this destroy the mainspring of justice? Does it not open the door to all manner of oppression? And, at first sight, the objection appears unanswerable. Not only is it the case that, as a historical fact, the vast majority of reforms has been carried in the name of individual rights, but it is hard to see how, human nature being what it is, any other principle can so effectually serve the purpose.

There are, however, two things to be borne in mind. In the first place, the Duty, which is to replace Right, is a reciprocal duty; it is binding on the government no less than on the individual citizen. And, in the second place, on both sides without distinction it is to be interpreted by the law of progress. Each of these conditions is an essential part of the argument of Mazzini. On the one hand, no government which refuses to perform its duties has any right to the allegiance of its subjects. On the other hand, for the government as for the individual citizen, the standard of duty is set not by the blind tradition of the past, still less by the supposed convenience of the moment, but by the highest light to which the speculative and the practical reason of man, acting jointly, have attained in the given generation. Where these conditions are disregarded, the relation between the government and the governed is reduced to one of brute force, in which each takes from the other whatever it can get. That, no doubt, has too often in modern times been the relation between the government and its subjects. But it has commonly been at least as much the fault of the former as of the latter. And it is certainly not the relation which Mazzini has in view. If man's conception of rights is progressive—and this the individualist is ready enough to acknowledge when it suits him—so also is his conception of duty; and it is binding no less on the government than on the governed.

Thus, to say that the principle of rights is not a primary, but a derived, principle is in no way to maintain either that the individual has no rights or that he is not entitled, so far as he has the power, to enforce them against his rulers. On the contrary, by insisting that the idea of Right rests on the idea of Duty, and that the duty in question, so far from being one-sided, is in the strictest sense reciprocal, Mazzini may justly be held to have laid stress on that aspect of Right which was persistently overlooked by Spinoza and Locke, and which yet, of all aspects, is the most essential. This, it need hardly be said, is its identity with justice.

Spinoza had identified Right with might. Locke, while implying that it was inseparable from justice, had never explicitly stated—in all probability he had never clearly realised—the relation between the two; still less had he drawn the consequence,

which inevitably follows, that the relation of the government to the governed is one of mutual duties and therefore regulated not merely by convention, but by a moral law which existed before the convention and from which the convention draws its only sanction. This consequence, if not first drawn by Mazzini, is at least more clearly stated by him than by any of his forerunners. The two senses of the term *Right*, divorced by the speculation of nearly two centuries, were once more united. The only basis of rights for the individual was seen to lie in what is right—that is, in what is just, what is morally no less than materially good—for the community and for mankind.

In this process it is doubtless true that the Right of the individual loses something of its sharpness; that it becomes less absolute than it was in the conception of Locke and still is in the popular imagination. But this very absoluteness, conflicting as it does violently with the facts, is the constant parent of confusion, if not of open war. To cancel it can, in itself, be nothing but a gain. The only danger—and it is a very serious danger—is lest we should at the same time sacrifice the undoubted benefits which it has brought in the past and imperil the further extension of them in the future. Absolute Right is perhaps, of all principles, the most intelligible; and its appeal is at once wider and more direct than is made by any other. It has, therefore, done yeoman's service in the cause of justice. But the service has been done roughly, and has brought many evils in its train. It may be long before men in general have learned to feel that the principle of public duty is as binding a principle as that of indefeasible Right, and more certain to gain, without alloy of evil, the end which both alike have in view. But, when they have learned it, they will find that they have exchanged a narrow and treacherous principle for one far wider and more trustworthy; for one which secures to them not only all that was offered by the idea of Right, and a great deal more besides, but which also gives the only stable, because the only reasonable, sanction by which that idea is to be justified.

They will find in Duty more than is offered by Right. For, while Right is stationary, it is the essence of Duty to be progressive, to be constantly widened with the widening of man's moral needs and quickened with the quickening of his moral sense. They will find in it the surest, and indeed the only solid, guarantee of what is valid in the idea of Right. For that idea, as we have seen, implies, even in its crudest form, the assumption of a common bond between the individuals in whose name it is asserted. It presupposes the State, of which by some it has preposterously been reckoned the foundation. To bring the secondary conception—that of Right—

into its proper place, to render explicit what has from the first lain behind it implicitly and unavowedly—its dependence on the idea of Duty—is certainly in the interest of truth; and, in the long run, it is likely to further the interest even of the individual. His rights are whatever the highest reflection of the time may show it is the duty of the State to grant him. His duties are whatever that same reflection may declare that the State has the right to claim. This at once removes the decision from the arbitrary will of the given State, the particular government. It institutes an appeal to that authority, whither the ultimate appeal in all other subjects also lies; to the common sense, the ripest wisdom, of mankind. And, as in all other subjects, that authority, though less imposing than the absolute authority assumed by the champions of abstract Right, is still both the highest and the surest accessible to man.

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? By subordinating itself to Duty, Right ceases, doubtless, to be absolute and indefeasible. But, for the same reason, it ceases to be stationary; it ceases also to work discord in its application. The claim to be compatible with progress—which, so long as Right is treated as absolute, is demonstrably untenable—becomes legitimate so soon as Right is conceived as dependent on a principle, itself confessedly progressive; so soon as it is derived from the idea of Duty. At the same time, in a far fuller sense than could ever be claimed before, it becomes universal in its application. It ceases to set man against man, or class against class; for it explicitly traces itself to the common bond which unites each to each and every member to the whole. Men have accepted Right as absolute, because they have put into it that which, as absolute, it is incapable of holding. They have believed it to be indefeasible because at the same time they believed it to be universal and progressive. Neither claim can, on these conditions, be logically sustained. It is only when Right ceases to be absolute and indefeasible that either of them can be made good. The effectiveness of Right, as an instrument of progress, has throughout depended on a misconception; and the sooner that misconception is removed, the better will it be for all parties. It is the merit of Mazzini to have done more than any other single thinker towards this salutary end.

We return to the examination of Mazzini's own statement of his theory; to his contrast between the principle of individuality and that of 'association.' The general result of his enquiry is to show that neither the conception of moral Duty nor, *a fortiori*, that of political Right is to be derived solely from the principle of individuality. That principle may supply the first germ, the 'promise and potency' of each conception; but for its subsequent expansion, its articulation into any growth that can be grasped and

reckoned with, the influence of corporate life, the recognition of a common bond between man and man, in some form, however rudimentary, is required. There are, as will readily be seen, some points in Mazzini's statement—notably the assertion that purely negative duties are discoverable solely by the individual conscience—which are not true to the facts and which are hardly to be reconciled with his general conclusion. But they do not very seriously affect the main tenor of his argument. That this is as has been stated above, there can be no reasonable doubt; nor can it be denied that it is sound.

Such, then, is the contribution of the individual element to the formation on the one hand of the moral law and, on the other, of political Right. In both cases it supplies the blank form. In neither case can it go further without the aid of that wider principle which, whether it take the shape of the city or the nation or humanity, is at bottom the same thing; the instinct of corporate life, the sense of community between one man and another.

That wider principle, the second vital element of human action, must now be defined with more exactness. What has it done for man in the past? What is it destined to do for him in the future? It is in the answer to these questions—and especially to the former of them, a question primarily of historical fact—that the true definition of the principle is to be found.

It is, in the first place, a principle essentially of duty; and, consequently, a principle which, whether man consciously realise it or no, is religious in its very nature, and which varies therefore with the progressive variation in his beliefs concerning God.

'What a gulf is fixed,' writes Mazzini, 'between the belief which struggles for utterance in the soul of the modern world, and will form the corner-stone of the moral life of the coming age, and that which was the foundation of the moral life of those we now call the ancients! And how close is the bond which unites our conception of the divine sovereignty with the conception we form of our duties! The earliest men *felt* God, but without understanding him, without even trying to understand him, in his law. They felt him in his power, not in his love. They had a confused notion of a vague relation between him and the individual soul. That was all. Unable to shake free from the sphere of sensible objects, they embodied God in one or other of them; in the tree they had seen struck by lightning, in the rock by which they had pitched their tent, in the beast that first passed before their eyes. This is what, in the history of religion, is called Fetichism. In those days men knew nothing beyond the Family; a reflection, so to speak, of their own individuality. Beyond the circle of the family there was nothing but strangers or, more commonly,

enemies. To help themselves and their family was the beginning and end of men's moral life.

'Later, the conception of God was widened. From sensible objects man rose timidly to abstract and general ideas. God was no longer the protector of the family, but of the league of several families, of the city, of the race (*la gente*). Fetishism was replaced by Polytheism, the worship of many gods. Then the moral law also enlarged its sphere of action. Men recognised the existence of duties wider than those of the family, and laboured for the welfare of the race, of the nation. Humanity, however, was still unknown. Every nation called the foreigner a Barbarian, treated him as such and sought his conquest or his humiliation by force or fraud. Every nation had within its bosom foreigners or 'Barbarians'; men, millions of men, not admitted to the religious rites of the citizens, supposed to be of a different nature, slaves among the free.

'The unity of the human race could never be admitted till it was so as a consequence of the unity of God. And the unity of God, divined though it was by some rare thinkers of antiquity and loudly proclaimed by Moses—with the fatal restriction, however, that one people only was the elect of God—was not fully recognised till the decline of the Roman Empire. This was due to Christianity. In the forefront of his faith Christ placed these two inseparable truths—there is but one God, and all men are his sons. And the promulgation of these two truths changed the face of the world and enlarged the sphere of the moral law to the farthest limits of the earth. To man's duties towards his family and his country were added his duties towards humanity. . . . Then, too, came a presentiment of other truths, truths which Christianity held in germ. From the mouth of the Apostles were heard sublime words, words which would have been unintelligible to antiquity, and which were misunderstood or ignored even by the later Church: "As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

'And now, after eighteen centuries of thought and experience and travail, it is our task to expand those germs; to apply that truth not only to the life of each individual, but to that whole body of human faculties and forces, now existing or to exist, which constitutes humanity; and to proclaim boldly not only that humanity forms one sole body and ought to be governed by one sole law, but that the first article of this law is progress; progress in *this* world, where it is our duty to realise as much as lies in our power of the design of God, while we prepare ourselves for a destiny still higher in the future. It is our task to teach men that, if humanity forms one sole body, we all, as members of that body, are bound to labour

for its growth and to make its life more full of harmony, energy and vigour. It is our task to assure ourselves that we cannot rise to God save through and for the souls of our brothers, and that it is our duty to raise and purify them, even when they do not call on us to do so. It is our task, seeing that nothing short of humanity as a whole can fulfil that part of God's design which He wills to be fulfilled here on earth, to substitute for the exercise of *charity* towards the individual a labour of *association*, directed towards raising the life of humanity as a whole, and to organise the family and the country with this aim. Other and wider duties will reveal themselves to us in the future, in proportion as we gain a clearer and less imperfect idea of the law of our life. So it is that God, our Father, guides us, by an education slow but continuous and religious in its very nature, towards the good of humanity; and, in that better life of the whole race, the individual life also is rendered continually better.' <sup>1</sup>

What are the points which stand out most clearly from the foregoing passage? They are the conception of progress and the conception of duty. In Mazzini's thought the two are so closely intertwined that, strictly speaking, it is impossible to separate them. But, bearing that in mind, we may endeavour to make clear to ourselves the part which each plays in the vital action of the whole. We shall then be in a position to say more exactly what is the function assigned by Mazzini to humanity and to the sense of corporate life, the ever-deepening need of association, on which it depends. We turn first to the conception of duty.

Throughout the whole passage, and indeed through all that Mazzini has written, runs the assumption that it is impossible to draw any line between the political and the moral life of man; and consequently that the former, no less than the latter, is dominated by the idea of duty. The distinction vulgarly drawn between them is, in his view, a purely arbitrary distinction. Political action—the work that a man does, or refrains from doing, for the sake of his own country or for mankind at large—is as much a matter of duty—duty done, or duty undone—as moral action, the work a man does, or neglects to do, for the sake of his neighbour or his own 'higher self.'

There is, indeed, one element—an element too often regarded as virtually the whole—of political life which, at first sight, seems in no way to lend itself to this interpretation. That is the element of Right. And, if rights were indeed the absolute, the unconditional, thing that Rousseau supposed, it is clear that they

<sup>1</sup> *Duties of Man: Opere*, xviii. pp. 49-52; *Writings*, iv. 265 f.; E. A. V., 305 f.; Dent, 45 f.

could in no sense depend upon the performance of duties. Such dependence would destroy the indefeasibility which, *ex hypothesi*, is of their very essence. But, as we have already seen, Mazzini rejects this conception of rights from the very beginning. He insists with unanswerable force that, even in its most rudimentary form, Right, involving as it does the existence of the community, involves also, and no less, a sense of mutual obligation between the members who compose it. He shows further that the idea of Right is, in itself, a mere abstract form; and that the content, which gives substance to this form, can be derived from no source save the public opinion of the community in which it works.

Thus the political, no less than the moral, law has its root in the sense of a common bond between man and man; it springs from the idea of duty. And what is true of its first origin is no less true of its subsequent development. No State which does not, with constantly increasing fullness, strive to realise in act and temper the conviction of common ties and common duties, the sense of 'partnership in every virtue and in all perfection,' from which it started, can continue for any length of time to hold together. The periods in which that ideal has been neglected, or slackly followed, are periods of decay or stagnation. The vital periods of a nation's history are those in which it has been sought intently and with passion. What but this is it that made the greatness of the Greek republics and of Rome? What but this that gave grandeur to the patriotic visions, imperfectly as they were wrought out in practice, of Dante and Milton? What but this that inspired the glory of England under Elizabeth, or of France during the Revolution?

If this view be accepted, we are at once rid of one at least among the difficulties which beset the theory of abstract rights. On that theory, the sole object for which the State exists is to secure for its members a greater amount of individual freedom than they could possibly attain in isolation. No line of action which does not, directly or indirectly, serve this purpose can be other than useless, or more probably harmful, to the general interest of the whole.

Now it may safely be said that no State whose acts have found, or have deserved to find, a record in history has ever attempted to conform itself to this ideal. The main stream of history has flowed down channels not merely not connected, but totally irreconcilable, with its attainment. Not only has the life of the State been largely independent of any endeavour to deepen or widen the liberties of the individual; but it has in fact, as Rousseau explicitly admitted, gone to straiten those liberties by many most trenchant limitations; and this not by accident, but from the very



nature of the case. The very conception of Right—involving, even in its lowest form, a corresponding scale of duties—imposes countless shackles on the unchartered freedom of the individual. Nor is this all. Interpret that conception as largely as we will, it does not cover more than a very small part of the life and energies of any nation. The objects for which men have spent their toil and shed their blood are not, for the most part, rights—the rights of the individual—but common interests and common duties. They have fought, not so much to mark out a sphere for the unshackled action of the individual, as to win a wider field for the energies of the community; not so much to extend the ‘liberties of the subject’ as to defend the existence or assert the superiority of the nation against its neighbours and rivals; not so much for ideas of Right as for ideas of humanity, justice and religion.

These are aims which differ widely among themselves. They differ still more widely from any that can possibly be sanctioned by the doctrine of individual rights. However divergent from one another, they all unite in recognising a corporate being and common duties in the nation as a whole. And these, far more than the enfranchisement of the individual, are the aims which have made the history, and filled the life, of the nations whose work has counted in the general progress of mankind. This is so even with our own country, which of all nations has paid most regard to the rights of the individual. It is so, to a far greater extent, with the history of Greece and Rome, of Italy and Germany, of France and of Spain.

It is true that, in the quest of these ideals, men have too often ‘followed wandering fires’; that, in immediate results at any rate, a crusade for humanity or religion has not seldom done more harm than good to the cause which it was intended to promote; and that national power in particular has more often than not been advanced by means which no sophistry can defend. This, however, is an objection which might be brought against any conceivable object that man can set himself to attain. And it is significant that the struggle, which of all others was waged the most precisely and the most narrowly for the rights of the individual, should also have been the struggle in which the commonest rights of the individual were the most ruthlessly trodden under foot.

This only proves that the abuse of an idea does not afford any presumption against the legitimacy of its use. With all its violence, the French Revolution remains an imperishable landmark in the progress of mankind. And the same is true of many of those other movements, of yet wider (if vaguer) import, which cannot

be summed up under any formula so simple as that of an extension, or vindication, of rights. Their success may have been imperfect. It has commonly been won, when won at all, by that imperfect instrument, the sword. But, in the long run, it has repeatedly proved to be for the welfare of mankind; or, if that be too much to claim in any instance, it has at least gone to preserve or strengthen the principle of nationality and, with it, one of the forces on which the welfare of humanity ultimately depends.

The historian, as judge of good and evil, of wisdom and of folly, is in no way bound to defend these things because he happens to find them in his records. Some of them, on the contrary, he is bound altogether to condemn. But it is one thing to condemn a particular act or course of acts; quite another to condemn, much more to ignore, the principle in the name of which it has been carried out or which, by means however blind, it has ultimately tended to secure. And when we find, as we undoubtedly do find, that certain principles—the principle of nationality, for instance, or the principle of humanity and equity—have, time out of mind, played a dominant part in moulding the common destinies of men, we have no choice but to say that any theory which fails to reckon with them, and to give them their due place in the sum of energies which go to make the living unity of the State, is for that, if for no other, reason an impossible theory; that, however consistent with itself, it is inconsistent with the facts; and consequently that, whatever service it may have rendered in the correction of practical abuses, it is speculatively false and must without hesitation be put aside.

Can it be denied that this is the case with the theory of individual rights? On that theory, the State is emptied of all positive content. It is not concerned with social justice. It has no voice in education, nor in the advancement of truth. It knows nothing of foreign policy; it has no part in the keener energies of nationality. It has no duties save to give every man a vote, and to prevent any man from laying hands on the life or property of his neighbour. The polling-booth and the policeman's truncheon are, in truth, all that is left to it; the former for the purpose of electing governors who are forbidden to govern; the latter with no right based on anything higher than blind custom or brute force.

It must further be noticed that the theory of rights leaves no room for the conception of progress. On the contrary, when rigorously interpreted, it implies that the world has gone backwards rather than forwards. In the state of Nature the individual enjoyed a freedom which, during subsequent ages of civil society, he utterly lost, and which, so long as he remains in that society,

he is never able entirely to regain. As compared with the 'dark ages,' his present condition, at any rate in the more advanced communities, may be described as one of progress. But when he looks back to what he was in the state of nature, he can only feel that he has changed hopelessly for the worse; he can only reproach himself bitterly for having preferred 'bondage to liberty,' 'Bondage with ease to strenuous liberty.' And even if the memory of 'natural' liberty could be banished from his mind, the progress now open to him could hardly be reckoned anything but beggarly. Compare it with progress as understood by the historian or in popular belief; with progress as measured by a scale wider and more generous than that of a mere theory or a sect. The progress of the historian, the progress of common parlance, is a progress compact of many elements; it is a progress, moreover, towards a goal which itself is essentially progressive. The horizon of man is constantly widening; and the prospect which would have seemed boundless to one century will be as a prison-house to the next. How different is the progress sought by the champion of rights! It is a progress composed not of many elements, but of one. It is a progress whose goal is stationary. It is a progress which can never be fully realised save by a return to the nature from which the 'noble savage' was base enough to escape. It is a progress, therefore, as inconsistent with itself as it is inadequate to the real needs of those who have argued themselves into taking it for their ideal.

From these objections, and others of the same sort, Mazzini's theory has nothing to fear. The 'rights' of Mazzini, so far from being the inalienable property of the individual, are rights derived from the community and inconceivable save as the counterpart of duties rendered in the service of the State. Springing from the community, they are for ever widening and deepening with the progress of the community. Based on a conception of social duty, they cover the whole range of social activity. They are rights of education, rights of material and moral protection, rights of equity, rights of real (as opposed to merely formal) citizenship, no less than rights of life and property and rights of selling a vote to the highest, or most powerful, bidder. And the real source of these rights is to be found, not in an arbitrary abstraction drawn from what the individual might have been in a state of isolation, but in the living duty of the community towards its members, of the whole towards the parts of which it is, intellectually and morally, the vital principle and the directing force. The duties of the individual to the community, of the community to the individual—these, and not the rights of one as against the other, are, in Mazzini's view, the determining factor of the problem.

And they are so because they stand for the principle of union, not for the principle of suspicion and disintegration. That, after all, is the real ground of Mazzini's hostility to the abstract conception of Right. As a derived principle, it is not only beneficial, but indispensable to the healthy life of the community. As a primary and absolute principle, it is fatal not only to the progress, but to the very existence, of the State.

The same reason which prompted Mazzini to subordinate Right to duty in the origin of the State and in the maintenance of it—regarded, by dint of abstraction, as a fixed product—caused him also to pass beyond that abstraction and to recognise progress as the most vital of all its characteristics. Once break through the arbitrary conception which, from the whole complex of objects that may be pursued by the State, singles out, as alone legitimate, that which consists in the enfranchisement of the individual; once replace it by the conception of common ties and reciprocal duties, and the idea of progress almost necessarily results. The very scope and fullness of the ideal—to say nothing of the infinite expansion which belongs to it—demand time, and continuous effort, for its realisation. This would be unmeaning unless it implied an advance from the less to the more completeness of attainment. And that, in its turn, is only another way of saying that there must be progress.

It may be objected that the conception of common ties and corporate life is no less clearly marked in the political theories of Plato and Aristotle, but that, in spite of this, the idea of progress is conspicuously absent from their writings. That is perfectly true. And, if this were the place for doing so, it would be interesting to trace the causes, partly speculative and partly historical, which led the Greek philosophers, who anticipated modern thought in many other points, to present so sharp a contrast to it in this. Here it can only be said that, while they are at one with Mazzini in rejecting the 'gross animal existence of man' as the basis of political life, at one with him therefore in insisting on the corporate being of the State and its dependence on the ideas of fellowship and of duty—and this, we may be very sure, is the first condition of all fruitful speculation on these matters—they differ from him in divorcing God, as the source and centre of all ideas, from ordinary life and action. They differ from him in cutting off the community, the City State, from the nation and from humanity. They differ from him, as a necessary consequence, in refusing to recognise progress as the law of history.

The difference is far-reaching. It covers not only the specific points indicated above, but the whole conception of the relation between the individual and the State. The alteration springs

from two distinct causes. It is partly due to a radical change of historical conditions. The community had outgrown the city and become the nation; it had stretched beyond the nation and begun to gather humanity within its bounds, while the philosophers were still arguing as if the world were the same as it had been to Aristotle and Plato. But it is also due to the genius of the great thinkers whose work has been sketched in the preceding chapters. The change of historical conditions—the growth of the city into the nation, the broadening of the nation into humanity—would have counted for little, had not a new order of ideas, a corresponding change of speculative and moral vision, been brought to its interpretation. It is by the predecessors of Mazzini that this new order was, for the most part, conceived and shaped. It is by them that the several links of it were mostly forged. But, if we except Hegel, not one of them had grasped the bearing of the whole chain of argument—in particular, not one of them had seen the change it must bring to the relation between the individual and the State—so completely or so vividly as the author of *The Duties of Man*. And if we are to realise the distance which severs the political theory of our own day from even the best and highest of the ancient world, we can hardly do better than contrast the results of Greek thought and practice with those which find their fullest expression in the writings of Mazzini.

To the Greek mind, in spite of the subjection of the individual to the State—or rather, just because of that subjection—there had always remained a deep sense of antagonism between the two. The State stood in terror of the individual. The individual resented the jealousy of the State. Plato held that no true political life could be attained without an enslavement of the individual, which to modern thought would seem intolerable. And in another, perhaps a still more pointed way, the same tale is told by ostracism. What was ostracism but a declaration that no individual, however blameless or however public-spirited, should be suffered to remain in the State which his greatness might conceivably overshadow? Can it be wondered that the suspicious watchfulness of the State should have been met, and justified, by the treason and insolence of its most conspicuous members, or that Alcibiades should have been the counterpart of Aristides? This was, as it must always be, the result of a system which sacrificed the free development of the individual to the supposed interest of the community at large. And the results of the opposite system, of individualism run wild, are probably still worse. Witness Feudalism, and the state of things which the Factory Laws were intended to redress.

In a healthy community the evils on either side are avoided by the same instinct which refuses to draw a hard and fast line

between the sphere of the individual and the sphere of the State; which judges each case, as it arises, upon its intrinsic merits; and will not be guided by any law save that of a generous expediency. But the theorists, unless like Burke they have been through the hard school of experience, are always at work to upset the balance, and to draw the statesmen either to the one side or the other. The idols of the theatre insensibly become the idols of the market-place and even of the tribe. It is the more important that they should themselves be as free from falsehood as human nature will allow. And the first means to ensure this is to bring our theory of the relation between the State and the individual into conformity with that recognised in practice; to avoid drawing a harsher line between the two than the needs of enlightened action can be shown to warrant. Here, if anywhere, practice must be the starting-point; and no theory which does not square with the practice worked out through ages of experience can claim to be correct.

This leads to the question: Is it possible to establish a frontier between the action of the individual and that of the State? Is there any sphere, however small, which either of them can claim exclusively for itself? Or are the two intertwined so inseparably as to forbid all hope whatsoever of demarcation? It is from this side that we may most profitably approach the remainder of Mazzini's theory and, in particular, those parts of it which are, more or less consciously, an answer to the theory of Hegel.

In political philosophy, as in other matters, we may trace an alternate ebb and flow of opinion. The ancient world, as we have seen, tended alike in theory and in practice to make the individual the bondsman of the State. And the same, though with certain qualifications, holds good of the Middle Ages. With the Reformation came the inevitable reaction. An age of revolt against authority and established institutions found its logical outcome in the theory of natural Rights. And this, in its turn, brought a revulsion—in some ways, a one-sided revulsion—towards the predominance of the State. For, if the champions of natural Right gave too much to the individual, it can hardly be doubted that their opponents of the succeeding age, while grasping a far larger measure of the truth, were commonly apt to give too much to the community at large. This is probably true of Fichte. It is certainly so of Comte. It is often brought as an accusation even against Hegel.

To secure 'freedom,' a fair field for the expansion of the individual's faculties, may be the end of the State, as conceived by Hegel; but it is an end, his critics assert, in the attainment of which the individual has little share; it is gained by forces over

which he has no appreciable control. The very conception of progress, which inspired the whole of Hegel's speculation and which he worked out more fruitfully than any of his predecessors, became, it is alleged, in his hands a fresh check on the freedom of the individual. The shackles, which the external and fixed law of the Greek State had imposed on that freedom, are reproduced, it is said, in a more impalpable, and therefore more oppressive, form in the 'dialectic movement,' the ebb and flow inherent in the universal, and through it controlling the individual, reason of Hegel.

Mazzini, there can be little doubt, was among those who held these suspicions.<sup>1</sup> How then does he attempt to meet what he regarded as the 'fatalism' of Hegel, and with what success?

In the first place, as will have been seen from the passage quoted earlier in this chapter,<sup>2</sup> he endeavours, though with considerable hesitation, to mark off a definite sphere of action in which the individual is everything and the community counts for nothing. That sphere is the assertion of what are commonly called negative duties. 'If our duties were merely negative . . . then, even in the stage of development which the least educated among us has at present reached, perhaps the voice of conscience'—the individual conscience—'might suffice us as a guide.' This passage, however, faulty as it is, carries with it its own correction. It implies that there was a time when the individual conscience was powerless to guide man even to negative duties, even to such as 'consist in not doing evil, in not injuring our brother man.' And if this be the case, it is manifest that, in the first instance, even such duties as these, obvious as they now seem even to the least enlightened conscience, must have been enforced rather by the 'social sanction' than by the instincts of the individual heart. For the positive duties, on the other hand, for those which demand an active effort on behalf of others, the need of the 'social sanction' is recognised by Mazzini from the first. It is also recognised that these are the more important duties; the duties on which the well-being and progress of humanity ultimately depend.

<sup>1</sup> After explicitly mentioning Hegel, Mazzini continues thus: 'Fatalism—whether assuming an aspect of optimism or pessimism—is the unavoidable outcome and consequence of the teachings of this school. And the consequences of fatalism are the justification of evil and the substitution of contemplation for action. Who indeed shall condemn evil if all things are inevitably linked together in a series of phenomena which are causes and effects in one, in virtue of certain laws and forces of matter, immutable because unintelligent?'—*Ernesto Renan: Opere*, xvi. pp. 120-1 (1872); translated in *Fortnightly Review*, Feb. 1874.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 262-3.

The attempt, therefore, to mark off an exclusive sphere for individual action must be held to have broken down. Mazzini takes, as he was entitled to take, the case which admittedly pleads more strongly than any other for the existence of such a sphere. And, by his own confession, the argument comes to nothing. The very passage, which appears to recognise a purely individual origin for negative duties, in fact bears witness precisely to the opposite effect. To Mazzini, as to Hegel, the community not only furnishes the matter of what are universally allowed to be by far the most numerous and important among the 'duties of man'—his duties towards his neighbour—but it also gives, in great measure, their origin and their sanction. It is the general, rather than the individual, conscience which first pronounces them to be duties and which, under the name of public opinion, provides for their enforcement.

Can we define the process more closely? Granted that the *general* result is due to the action of the community as well as of the individual, can we say that there is any stage of it in which a dominant, though not an exclusive, part is reserved for the individual? It is in the answer to this question that Mazzini is most successful in modifying the statement of Hegel. It is here too that he most fruitfully applies the idea of progress.

Each stage of man's progress, he argues, each step in the further application of the law—whether intellectual, political or moral—is, in fact, due to the energy and insight of the individual. It is in the nature of a revolt against the established code, against the body of truth hitherto generally accepted, in one or other of these fields. One or more individuals may initiate this revolt; many or few may join to carry it to victory. The principle is the same; it is invariably the principle of individuality, what is seen and willed by the individual, against the principle of the general creed, against what has been seen and willed by the community. Upon this fact no thinker, not even Mill, has laid greater stress than Mazzini.

'In answer to those who deny the testimony of the individual conscience and who appeal solely to the consent of humanity,' he writes, 'it is enough to recall the fact that all the great ideas which have advanced the cause of humanity began to work in opposition to beliefs in which humanity was unanimously agreed, and that they were proclaimed by individuals whom humanity laughed to scorn, persecuted and crucified.'<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, is one task which must be performed by the individual, or not at all; one province in which it is not only injustice but madness for the community, directly or indirectly,

<sup>1</sup> *Duties of Man: Opere*, xviii. p. 36; *Writings*, iv. 248; E. A. V., 293; Dent, 33.



to interfere. Such interference is not only an assault on the rights of the individual—that, at the present moment, is beside the point—it is an act of moral and intellectual suicide; it is an act fatal to the well-being, to the vital principle, of the nation and of mankind. ‘There are things,’ says Mazzini, ‘which constitute your individuality, and which are essential to man’s life. Over these the nation has no control. No majority, no collective force, has the power to rob you of that which makes you men. No majority has the power to decree tyranny and crush or alienate private liberty. Against the suicidal act of a nation which should do this, you have not the power to use force. But there lives, and will live for ever, in each one of you the right to protest by whatever means circumstances may suggest.’<sup>1</sup>

This must not be taken to imply that whatever the individual chooses to propose must necessarily be right. If he has the right of proposing, the right of testing, and, if necessary, of rejecting, rests with the common sense of the community or of mankind. In the assize of truth, the individual bears witness; but the part both of judge and jury belongs to the nation or to mankind. The function of the individual is definite, and it is of crucial importance. He supplies the matter without which no truth could be discovered and no progress could be made. There, however, the part peculiar to him ends. It is not by him so much as by the community that the evidence is sifted. It is by the latter solely that the final verdict is pronounced.

Such is the part played by the individual in the acquisition of new truth. From this we can argue back to that which falls on him in the guardianship of truth previously acquired. Those who lay stress on the work done in this matter by the community are apt to speak as though the individual were little more than a machine in the hands of an overmastering power; as though he not only drew all his life from the community—so far as the matter of it can be specifically defined, that is doubtless true—but his whole life were included in the services which he is expected to render to the community. Few things have done more to discredit the opponents of individualism than this. And nothing can be more clear than that this is not only no essential part of their doctrine but that it is inconsistent with the idea which lies at the base of all that gives that doctrine its real value. Hegel was right in saying that liberty is the law of all human endeavour, though he may not altogether have succeeded in working out the principle to its natural consequences.

Why is it of capital concern to men that, alike in the single

<sup>1</sup> *Duties of Man: Opere*, xviii. p. 89; *Writings*, iv. 309; E. A. V., 339; Dent, 78.

community and in the world at large, there should be progress? Partly, no doubt, because progress is the very being of the community, the law of its life, the means by which mankind works its way to its appointed end. So far the well-being of the individual does not—directly, at any rate—enter into the case. But it is also because it is of the last importance, alike to the community and to the individual, that neither of them should become the slave of custom, that neither should ‘sicken into the muddy pool of conformity and tradition.’ Those are the two things we have in mind when we speak of the necessity of progress. Of the two, the second is perhaps even more deep-reaching than the first; and it is so just because it includes, as the other does not include, the individual within its scope. A progress which should be hostile to the free growth of the individual, or a progress which should leave the individual altogether untouched, is not the progress for which men have fought in the past; it is not the progress for which any wise or brave man will care to fight now or in the future. It is not enough that truth or well-being should be advanced in the abstract. What we want is a truth that shall be operative in the individual heart, a well-being that shall make itself felt in the individual life.<sup>1</sup>

Now, if progress is to be desired, not indeed solely but largely, and even mainly, because it is necessary to the quickening of the individual life, the same reason must make us wish that in that field of thought and action which is for practical purposes untouched by progress—which, in any given generation of men, remains virtually what it was in the generation preceding—the energies of the individual shall be carried to the highest pitch of keenness and activity. It is not only in the few, to whom we look for the discovery of new truth or the achievement of new benefits, that we desire such activity; but also, and no less, in the many on whom depends the maintenance of the old truths and the fulfilment of the old duties. If these are maintained and fulfilled mechanically, they might as well not be maintained or fulfilled at all. And that is only another way of saying that, for the maintenance of the old as well as for the discovery of the new, we must trust in the last resort to the energy of the individual. This is so in the interest of the community no less than in that of the individual himself.

Here, then, we have a second function—less brilliant, doubtless, than the first, but not less important—in which a distinctive part is set aside for the individual. In the discharge of this function, to draw a precise line between the work of the individual and that of

<sup>1</sup> In the words of Hegel, ‘*Freiheit kann nur da seyn, wo die Individualität als positiv im göttlichen Wesen gewusst wird*’ (there can only be freedom where individuality is apprehended as something positive in the divine being).—*Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 63.

the community is, no doubt, impossible. All we can say is that, while the community lays down the law, it is the individual who both puts it in force and gives to it what the Roman jurists call a 'living voice.' Without the spontaneous action of the individual the law is a dead letter. It is from the individual that it draws the 'spirit which giveth life.' 'Morality,' to use the terms of Hegel, is the necessary counterpart of 'conduct' (*Sittlichkeit*). It is that alone which prevents conduct from sinking into conventionality and routine.<sup>1</sup>

Such, then, is the threefold task of the individual in this matter. To him is due the recognition that there is a law binding on man, just because he is man. It is he who gives vital worth to the fulfilment of that law when, and in so far as, it has been defined in detail. And it is he who suggests all new developments of that law for the judgement and, it may be, the acceptance of the community or of mankind.

To the community, on the other hand, falls the task of enforcing the law; sometimes by the material machinery of the tribunals, criminal and civil; far more commonly by the impalpable sanction of public opinion, education and the like. To the community also falls the task of defining the law, of working it out in specific detail, of giving a content, at once general and definite, to the blank form of duty which finds its home in the heart of the individual.

So far we are perhaps entitled to distinguish between the function of the individual and that of the community. But, when all is said and done, it remains true not only that neither element can work independently of the other, but that all attempts to mark off separate functions for each are more or less arbitrary in their nature. In each of the cases taken above it is, in truth, rather a question of less and more than of any absolutely exclusive action on the part of either element. If the individual, for instance, finds the law of duty written in his heart, that is largely because he has been bred in a community where that law is widely recognised, by which, as a community, it is held together. If, on the other hand, the community is enabled to enforce its sanction on the specific code of its own time and place, and to enlarge that code by a continuously progressive application of immemorial principles, that is mainly because in every healthy community we may count on finding a certain number of men who have the courage to speak their inmost mind and to act on opinions which, however unpopular, they know to be true and just.

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered, however, that the individual element enters even into the *Sittlichkeit* of Hegel. 'Das Sittliche ist die Einheit des subjektiven und allgemeinen Willens' (conduct is the unity of the subjective and universal will).—*Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 62.

For convenience sake, then, we may distinguish, at various points, between the part contributed by the individual and that assignable to the community; and it is important to do so. But it is still more important to remember that the two are mutually dependent; that the individual would be nothing without the community and, conversely, the community nothing without the individual. It is just because the one has commonly been divorced from the other that the results, alike in the theory and the practice of politics, have often been so unworthy. The exclusive cult of the individual, the conviction that there are certain spheres in which he is undisturbed master, has ended in cramping, if not dissolving, the life of the community. The exclusive cult of the community, the conviction that in every sphere of thought and action it is the only influence worth counting, has ended in dwarfing the free growth of the individual.

It is in this sense that Mazzini writes: '*Neither of these tests*'—neither the conscience of the individual nor the general consent of humanity—'when taken singly, is sufficient to give men knowledge of the law of God and of truth. Yet the conscience of the individual is sacred; the common consent of humanity is sacred. And whoever neglects to consult both one and the other deprives himself of a means essential to the knowledge of truth. The general error hitherto has been that men have desired to attain that knowledge by *one or other* of these channels exclusively. And the consequences of this error are fatal. It is impossible to set up the individual conscience as the sole test of truth without falling into anarchy. It is impossible to say that at a given moment the general consent of mankind is beyond appeal without stifling man's freedom and plunging into tyranny. . . . Both these things are sacred; God speaks in both of them. And wherever the two are in agreement, wherever the cry of your own conscience is confirmed by the consent of humanity, there you may be sure of holding the truth within your grasp. The one is the verification of the other.'<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could be said more strongly; and, till the last two sentences, nothing could be said more truly. The test of truth proposed in those sentences is, however, obviously misleading. Agreement between the individual and the community is just no test at all. Centuries may pass before the 'cry of conscience' is raised against an accepted opinion, though, when once raised, it may find an echo in the heart of every just and right-thinking man. The case is too plain to need further argument. Yet the correction of Mazzini's error is to be drawn from his own teaching. Through-

<sup>1</sup> *Duties of Man: Opere*, xviii. pp. 36, 38; *Writings*, iv. 249-50; E. A. V., 293, 295; Dent, 34-5.

out the rest of his argument it is implied that of truth no test, infallible and mechanical, is to be discovered; that progress is essentially not that which 'cometh with observation'; and that the precise course which it is destined to follow, the exact points in the received code which it is to modify, can in no wise be predicted. It is rather a vital force inherent in humanity as a whole, a force whose existence is proved by the history of civilised mankind, than one which can be localised in a given spot, or timed to make itself felt at a given moment. So far as Mazzini implies—and in his closing words he certainly does imply—the contrary, so far he is consistent neither with the facts nor with the general tenor of his own argument. And the real root of the error lies in this: that the controlling force, which Mazzini had elsewhere lodged jointly with the individual and the community, is here virtually placed in the individual alone. It is the individual as such—the mere chance-comer, without regard to place, time, faculty or circumstance—who, if the words are to be taken strictly, is here made master of the whole position. Whatever his conscience approves is to be regarded as henceforth beyond question. In fact, however, and according to the general trend of Mazzini's argument, it is not the individual so taken in abstraction, but the individual as qualified by education, faculty, and above all by opportunity, who is alone able to counsel in this matter. It is, moreover, only in the ripeness of time that the opportunity comes. And that amounts to saying that it comes only with the co-operation of many minds, and when the way has been prepared for it by the experience and criticism of many generations. It may come through the individual. But, if so, it is the individual trained under the very code against which he protests and by the very society which he desires to reform; the individual who is what he is because he is member of a given community, and who does what he does because he is led by circumstances which, possibly for ages past, the history of the community has been shaping.

It is, then, in the joint action of individual and community that, at every point, we must look for the spring of man's moral and political life; and at no point more markedly than in that which concerns the achievement of progress. And, in spite of the hesitations noted in the preceding pages, there is no man who, on the whole, has seen this more clearly than Mazzini. It is not merely that he refuses to sacrifice either of the two elements to the other; but that, with certain natural vacillations, he maintains the action of the one to be impossible at any moment without the action of the other. It is not merely that, at some stage or other of the process, both elements must have been present; but that, unless both elements are throughout working in mutual

action and reaction, the whole process from first to last would be impossible. It is the difference between a mechanical process on the one hand and a vital process upon the other. And though earlier writers from Fichte onwards had used the analogy of a vital process to illustrate the nature of man's social and political life, it may be doubted whether any of them, Hegel himself hardly excepted, had grasped the full consequences of the conception—in particular, as to the absolute interdependence of the community and the individual—so completely as Mazzini.

We are now in a position to ask: What exactly are the points in which Mazzini strove to modify the political theory which he inherited from Hegel; how far those modifications are in themselves reasonable; and how far, in guarding himself against one line of attack, Mazzini avoided exposing himself to others.

Mazzini is at one with Hegel in rejecting the independence, much more the supremacy, of the individual; at one with him in regarding the life of the individual as inseparable from that of the community; at one with him in accepting progress as the key to all that is worth having in human endeavour, not only in the things of the intellect but also in the moral and social activities of man. He differs from Hegel in the importance which he attaches to the idea of duty. He differs also, to some extent, in his conception of the part discharged by the individual in the maintenance and advancement of man's moral and social, to say nothing of his intellectual, ideals.

Or, if we bring the matter into relation with the work of previous thinkers, it may be stated thus. From Locke onwards, speculation had been haunted by the endeavour, more or less consciously pursued, to divorce politics from morals. Kant<sup>1</sup> and, in his earlier writings, Fichte, had explicitly staked everything on enforcing the severance. With Hegel the attempt, so fertile in confusion, was finally abandoned. But it was so, as his critics assert, at the cost of reducing the sphere of distinctively moral action—of that action in which the individual consciously strives to realise his own ideals—virtually to nothing. Mazzini adopts the criticism, and sets himself to redress the balance. While retaining, with Hegel, the element of corporate life, which earlier thinkers had ignored, he strove to assert for the individual the initiative which Hegel has commonly been taken to deny. In attempting this, it was inevitable that he should recast the law of progress, as formulated by Hegel. Was it possible to do so, without destroying the whole system of Hegel from top to bottom?

The point, then, attacked by Mazzini in the Hegelian account of progress—and it is the point which to others also has seemed

<sup>1</sup> [But see p. 69.—ED.].

the most open to objection—is that it appears to deny to the individual any power of initiative, alike in the field of thought and in that of action. It is clear that two questions arise: How far is this, in reality as well as in appearance, the effect of Hegel's doctrine? And if it be, how far can the objection, which is instinctively felt against such a view of things, reasonably be sustained?

The truth is that Hegel does not deny, either directly or indirectly, the originative power of the individual. What he does deny is, on the one hand, that in any field of activity the individual can start uninfluenced by the conditions under which he has been born and bred; and, on the other hand, that, if his activity be sound, it can do otherwise than follow the lines laid down for it by the law of reason which has made humanity what it is in the present and which, under perpetually fresh forms, is constantly remoulding it to further developments, incalculable but none the less inevitable, in the future. Is there anything, in either of these denials, which is inconsistent with freedom or with which, if we know what we are about, we can reasonably quarrel? To dispute either of them would, in fact, be to gainsay the existence of any law whatsoever; to maintain that, in the corporate life of man, there is no intelligible principle and no progress. For, where the present is not conditioned by the past, there can be no intelligible principle; and where there is no intelligible principle, no law of reason, there can be nothing worthy the name of progress.

The fact is that, whatever he himself may have supposed, it is not against the general principles of Hegel's system that Mazzini's criticisms are valid. It is at most against the particular form which they take in application to political theory. The fundamental principles of Hegel were, in truth, also those of Mazzini. Like Hegel, Mazzini held the community to be something much more than an aggregate of its individual members, its life something much more than the sum of their several energies. Like Hegel, he believed this essentially corporate life to be governed by a law of continuous and rational progress. Like Hegel, he maintained that law to be a spontaneous growth, intelligible only from itself. It is an inevitable consequence of all this, though Mazzini may hardly have realised it to the full extent, that the individual should, at one point after another, be controlled by the community—the community of the past as well as of the present; and that, even when he has seemed to be most free from that control at the moment of action, the final effect, the ultimate significance, of his action should be controlled by the larger tendencies which go to make the life of the community of the future. The individual may cast the seed into the ground; it is a power higher

than his which determines the manner of its growth. The individual may rough-hew his ends; it is for the community, for the law of reason which ceaselessly moulds the community, to shape them to its own. It is only in so far as he has acted, consciously or unconsciously, in accordance with that law—a law for ever in becoming, it must be remembered, and never in being—that the effect of his acts will approach to that which was in his own personal intention.

All this is only another—though, doubtless, a more explicit—way of saying what Mazzini himself says when he declares the action of the individual to be inseparable from that of the community, the community from the individual, and both alike to be governed by the more general law of the progress of mankind. The main difference between the two statements is that, while Mazzini confines himself chiefly to the reforms deliberately proposed by the individual, with the distinct aim of purifying the social code, the moral standard of man, as it exists at a given time, Hegel extends his view to those acts which have no purpose directly moral, to those which are forced on the individual either by his own character and ‘passions’ or by the political needs of the time in which he lives. He concerns himself less with reformers such as Socrates or Luther than with men of action—by preference, men of ambitious action—such as Alexander, Caesar or Napoleon.

So far, he is more concrete than Mazzini. He includes much which Mazzini leaves on one side; he accounts for much which Mazzini would have found it hard to reconcile with the particular form taken by his theory. This, in itself, is a signal advantage. It is the more so, because it enables Hegel to define more closely the relation between the individual and the community. A reference to Hegel’s own words will allow us to judge how far they are inconsistent with Mazzini’s statement of the case, or how far they are merely an extension—and to that extent a correction—of it.

Having declared Freedom—progress in the consciousness and realisation of Freedom—to be the goal of man’s corporate life, the final end of the spiritual world—‘The question which next arises,’ continues Hegel, ‘can only be, What means does Freedom employ for its own realisation? . . . The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men spring from their needs, passions, interests, characters and talents; so much so, indeed, that in the drama of history it is only these which appear as motives or play the leading part. It is true that, behind these, we find more general ends at stake; a desire for the good, a noble patriotism. But these virtues and these more general ends stand in an insignificant relation to the world and the world’s business. We can indeed see the aims of reason realised in a small number of



men and in the sphere of their activity. But as compared with the great mass of the human race their number is small, and the scope of their effective influence relatively narrow. It is the passions, the ends of individual interest, the satisfaction of selfish aims, which are the really strong force. Their power lies in the fact that they respect none of the bounds which Right and morality strive to set to them, and that these natural forces lie far closer to men than the artificial and tedious discipline of order and self-restraint, of morality and Right. When we consider this drama of passions and see the consequences of their violence and of the stupidity which has attended not only *their* working but also, and still more, the pursuit of high purposes and righteous aims; when we behold all the wrong and wickedness which man has brought about, all the ruin which he has brought on great empires, then we can only be filled with grief for the past and, knowing it to be the work not merely of nature but the will of man, we must feel a moral desolation, a rebellion of the good spirit, if such a thing is to be found in us, against the cruelty of such a spectacle. . . . And while we regard history as a slaughter-house in which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, the virtue of individuals, are offered up, we are driven to ask ourselves for whom, and for what end, these appalling sacrifices are made? . . .

‘The first thing to bear in mind is that what we have called the principle, the final end, the determining idea, or the nature of the spiritual principle, is something merely universal and abstract. A principle or law is something inward and, as such, however actual its presence, it is not yet completely realised. An end or ground of action exists at first in our thoughts, in our inner purpose; and not, so far, in reality. What exists ‘in itself’ is a possibility, a capacity, which has not yet won its way from the inner life to actual existence. Before it can do so, a second ‘moment’ is necessary; that is, actualisation, realisation; and the principle of this second moment is the will, the activity of man in its most general sense. It is only through this activity that the abstract idea, or its implicit articulations, can be realised: for in themselves they have no direct power. The activity which sets them in motion and gives them concrete being lies in the needs, impulses, inclinations and passions of men. . . . It is the infinite right of the individual, as subject, to find happiness in his own activity, his own work. If a man is to interest himself in anything, he must find himself in it, his individual feelings must be gratified in it. . . . Hence nothing can be accomplished, unless the individuals, who are active in the matter, find also their gratification in it. They are individual men; that is, they have needs, impulses, interests, peculiar to themselves. Among these needs is to be

reckoned the satisfaction not only of their individual necessities and will, but of their individual insight and convictions—if, that is, the need of argument, the needs of the understanding and the reason, have already been awakened.

‘So we say that nothing is accomplished without the interest of those who have brought it about by their activity. And, since an interest is also a passion, in so far as the whole individuality of the man, to the subordination of all other interests and ends which are or might be present to his mind, is thrown into a single object and concentrates all its needs and powers on this one end, it may be boldly said that nothing great in this world has been accomplished without passion.

‘Thus there are two “moments” which enter into our object. The first is the “Idea”; the second, the passions of men. The former is the warp, the latter the woof of the broad tapestry spread before us in the history of the world. The middle term in which both are harmonised is the moral (*sittliche*) freedom embodied in the State. So far as to the idea of freedom, considered as the law of the spiritual world and the absolute aim of human action in history. . . .

‘It appears from what has been said that a State is well organised and strong in itself when the private interests of its citizens are in unison with its own more general ends, and when the one finds its satisfaction and realisation through the other. But the State has need of many institutions, as also of long intellectual struggles, before it can fully discover the means necessary to the attainment of its ends. It has need, besides, to do battle with the particular interests and particular passions of its members, to train them by a hard and tedious discipline, before that unison can be brought about. The time during which such a unison lasts is the period of its flowering, its virtue, its strength and happiness. But the history of the *world* does not, like the history of more special groups of men, begin with any conscious aim. The simple gregarious impulse, which in the first instance unites each of those smaller groups, carries with it from the first the conscious aim of securing life and property; and, when such gregarious life has once been instituted, that aim gradually expands. The history of the world, on the other hand, begins with a general end, the satisfaction of the spiritual idea, merely implicitly, as a natural prompting. This is an inward, a completely inward and unconscious impulse; and the whole work of the world’s history lies in the bringing of it to consciousness. When it appears in the form of purely natural life and natural will, that which we have called the subjective element takes the shape of needs, instincts, passions, individual interests, instinctive opinion and purely subjective imagination.

This vast mass of wishes, interests and activities forms the instrument and means through which the spirit of the world fulfils its end, raises it into the sphere of consciousness and so realises it. And its end is to find itself, to come to itself, to grasp itself as reality. But that these living energies of individuals and nations, at the same time that they are seeking and satisfying their own ends, are also the means and instruments of something higher and further, of which they know nothing, and which they fulfil unconsciously—it is just this which can be, and has been, called in question, and which has again and again been denied, decried, and despised as a mere dream of Philosophy. On this point, however, I have spoken plainly from the beginning. And our faith and assumption—an assumption which, at the close of our enquiry, was to appear as a result—is that, as reason governs the world, so it has also governed the whole course of the world's history. As against this general, absolute and vital element all else is subordinate and serves but as a means for its realisation. Moreover, this spirit of reason is immanent in the concrete life of history, and fulfils itself in and through that life. The union of the general and absolute with the particular and the subjective—the proof that in this union alone lies the truth of things—this belongs to the province of “speculation” and, in that general form, is treated in the science of Logic. In the course of the world's history, however,—a course which is still in progress—the needs and interests of the individual have not yet taken into themselves that which is the final end of all history. Yet, though the individual is unconscious of it, the general end is none the less present in the particular ends, and fulfils itself through them.’<sup>1</sup>

In the above passage two things in particular are to be observed. The first is the unwavering firmness with which Hegel holds the scales between the individual and the corporate, the subjective and the objective, element in the history of man. The second—which, in fact, is consequent upon the first—is the profound insight he shows into the relation of the one element to the other. In the last resort, as will have been seen, this depends upon a speculative principle which lies very near the root of his philosophy; upon his manner of conceiving the relation between the particular and the universal. The particular to him is neither, as it is to the nominalist, complete in itself; nor is it, as to the realist, a mere reflection, a copy in miniature, of the universal. Under one form or another, the particular is always in the universal, the universal in the particular.

Thus, in astronomy, the single body may seem to exist in complete independence of all the others. But, in fact, not merely

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp. 25-33.

its motion, but its whole nature and constitution, not to say its very existence as a separate body, are determined by its relation to the planetary, or the stellar, system. 'This relation is the contradiction of its independent and separate existence.'<sup>1</sup> In zoology the relation is still more intimate and deep-reaching. The beast has power of free movement; he has life, instinct, feeling; all that constitutes individuality in its simplest, most abstract, form.<sup>2</sup> But all this is qualified by his relation to the species, by the working of those general laws which, abstract in themselves, 'find their concrete embodiment and substance' in the individual, and are the negation of the immediate individuality, which belongs to the living being, as a purely natural product.'<sup>3</sup>

In man, finally, the fusion of the two elements reaches its highest, and for that reason its most complex, shape. In him both individuality and universality are raised to a yet higher power; and, in the raising, they are yet more completely fused. As a mere animal, man has a freedom—or, to speak more correctly, a license—alike of thought and action, which is denied to the beast. At the same time, that very freedom enables him to conceive and realise aims which are, in the widest sense, universal in their nature; to present to himself the laws which govern the development of the race; and to direct both thought and action by this light. And, seeing that the individual is inseparable from the community—that every fresh step gained by the community is, in promise and potency if not in actuality, a step gained by the individual also—it follows that, the more completely the individual takes to himself the progress attained by the community—the more free the scope given to the universal element in his nature—the more keenly also does he sharpen his faculties, as an individual. The true freedom is not license to act without law, to do precisely what the caprice of the moment may suggest. It is the habit of acting according to law, the law which our own reason has apprehended and which is writ large in the life of the community. The true individuality is not that which is at the mercy of every fleeting instinct, and therefore void of all lasting and substantial content. It is that which has appropriated to itself the widest possible life, the fullest possible content, from the community around it; which has transmuted that universal content into its own personal instincts and subjective desires; and which, as occasion offers, has bettered the instruction it has received from others, has widened the already wider life in which it has been nurtured, and so has stamped itself as a new force, a personality strong from its very universality, upon the common life of its

<sup>1</sup> Hegel's *Werke*, vii. i. (*Naturphilosophie*), § 268.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* § 351.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* § 367.

generation. Conversely, the true corporate life is not that which stifles the individual, but that which fosters the growth of such personalities and sharpens their intensity.

So far Hegel, as to the relation between the individual and the community, between the subjective and the objective element in the life of man. It can hardly be said that, in this statement, there is anything directly incompatible with what Mazzini says on the same matter; though there is certainly much that Mazzini himself would hardly have written, much that deals with regions of thought which he was little accustomed to explore. The main difference between the two men, however, lies, it will be observed, in a direction exactly the opposite of that which is commonly supposed. It is not that Hegel attributes less weight to the personal and individual element than Mazzini, but that he attributes more. It is not only that he includes more in the individual, that he gives more weight to individual passion, and even to individual caprice, than Mazzini would have dreamed of doing; but that he starts from the individual, insists with yet more urgency than Mazzini that everything should be stated in terms of the individual, and maintains that the highest aims of the community are, in the strictest sense of the word, nothing until they are embodied in individual insight and individual energy.

But if the aims, the 'passion,' of the individual be the controlling force at the moment of action, what becomes, it may be asked, of that universal law, that 'government of the world by reason,' on which Hegel no less constantly insists? The act, when once done, is irrevocable; and whatever be the determining element at the moment of action must also continue to govern it even to its remotest consequence. It is precisely this that Hegel denies. 'These living energies of individuals and nations, at the same moment that they are seeking and satisfying their own ends, are also the means and instruments of something further and higher, of which they know nothing, and which they fulfil unconsciously.' The act is cast into the world by the individual, as the outward issue of his individual purpose. But, once cast, it is no longer his intention, it is the inherent nature of the act, it is the law controlling the soil into which it is thrown, that governs its issues. This, as Hegel says, has 'again and again been denied, decried and despised as a dream of philosophy.' But, none the less, it is true; and, as Hegel points out, it is only what common sense would have led us to expect. Just as, in the experience of our purely personal action, a given deed may be found to contain a great deal more than lay in the intention of the agent, to entail consequences which he not only never foresaw but which, had he foreseen, he would have been the first to dis-

claim and, if possible, to avoid; so, in the larger field of national or universal history, the single act, the whole life, of the individual may, in the long run, be moulded to issues entirely different from those which he proposed.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, Hegel saves the freedom of the individual at least as completely as Mazzini; and, on the other hand, he provides for the controlling action of the community yet more thoroughly than his successor. The law which governs the life of the community is, to the individual agent, no law of iron. It is a law which is neither necessarily, nor even generally, present to his mind at the moment of action. It is a law which may even, to some slight extent, be modified by—a law which assuredly has to reckon with—his individual caprice. Only the remoter effects of his action are determined by it. Action itself, his will as agent—save in so far as they are determined by his *own* character and his *own* past—are free. At the same time, it is just through his own character and his own past that the life of the community becomes his life also. His character, his reason, have been moulded by the society in which he lives. His purposes are, in greater or less measure, the purposes of his country and his age. No man, however original, but is, in large measure, the creature of his age. Conversely, it is just because he is the creature of his age that he is able, in his turn, to modify its life. Were not the conditions with which he has to deal, as citizen and statesman, the conditions which had already moulded his life, as an individual, he would be unable to comprehend them; much more, to shape them to his own purpose. And, because he does stand close enough to them to shape them to his own purpose, he must submit also to learn that his own purpose, even when it has triumphed for the moment, is liable to be overruled by the wider issues, of which it is but a broken, and possibly a distorted, reflection.

The theory of Hegel, on its more abstract side, is thus sound in itself. It also more than meets the requirements of Mazzini. When fairly examined, it is seen to give all that is given by *The Duties of Man*; and, thanks to its fuller articulation, to give a great deal more besides. Mazzini may be said to deal, mainly if not solely, with the more unselfish side of human action; with those elements of action which serve to promote the welfare of a nation or of mankind, conceived as an end to the consciously and deliberately pursued. Hegel includes all this; but he includes much more also. He recognises that there is a vast world of action which lies entirely beyond the scope of self-sacrificing devotion. The play of self-interest, of ambition—in one word, of 'passion'—has, he maintains, counted for much more in the

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 35.

moulding of mankind than all the devotion to unselfish ends recorded in history. And no theory of progress which does not reckon with all that, at first sight, would seem to put progress beyond hope, can claim to have looked the difficulties of the problem fairly in the face. It deals only with the easier conditions of the problem; it leaves the harder ones untouched. It is the greatness of Hegel that, having given the fullest possible weight to all difficulties, he is yet able to keep his faith in progress unshaken and to base it on ground which has never yet been successfully assailed.

But if, in its more general statement, the theory of Hegel is proof against the objections which have sometimes been urged against it, can the same thing be said of its more special application? It can hardly be denied that Hegel looks with extreme jealousy on all action conceived in an idealist spirit, on all action which is purposely directed to the enfranchisement, much more to widening the political activities, of the community at large. Such distrust was no necessary part of his theory. It flowed rather from the intense caution of his temper than from the logical requirements of the relation he had established between the action of the individual and the corporate life of the nation or of mankind. Of great thinkers, he is perhaps the most conservative on record. And he is never weary of jibing at the political reformers, the 'leaders of the hosts of shallowness,' of his day. Hence the offence given by his famous utterance—'The real is the rational, and the rational is the real.' It was not the saying itself, so much as the practical turn given to it by its author, which excited resentment. No one is more ready than Hegel to distinguish, on occasion, between the outward form of the actual, which is seldom or never completely rational, and its inner spirit, to which no philosophy can deny the quality of rationality. But, unfortunately, no one could also be more ready, when it suited his purpose, to confound the one with the other, and to assure the world that the most retrograde and oppressive institutions, being undeniably actual, must also be accepted as indisputably rational. Actual at the present moment, actual they were therefore destined always to remain. Whoever questioned them was, from the mere fact of doing so, excommunicated from philosophy.

Such extravagances are, doubtless, pitiable enough. They are made still more pitiable by the ungenerous spirit which Hegel displayed against those whom he attacked. But, when all is said and done, they are no more than casual applications of the theory which underlay his speculative work. They are applications due to accidents of temperament and circumstance. And the theory itself they leave untouched. So far, indeed, from being necessary, or even natural, consequence of that theory, they are inconsistent

with the belief in freedom and progress which, on Hegel's own showing, is of the essence of his creed. And, in rejecting them, Mazzini can fairly claim to have understood Hegel's meaning more truly than Hegel himself.

Now, if this be a true account of the matter, it is clear that neither Mazzini nor Hegel can be said to have seen the full bearings of the idea by which both of them were possessed. Mazzini fails to make allowance for the more material side of human action. He writes as if all men were as devoted, as deeply fired by love of the ideal, as he was himself. Hegel, on the other hand, in his desire to account for the material, is apt to forget that his theory, like all theories worthy of the name, is nothing if not ideal. Content to show that the actual bears in it the potency of the ideal, he is in no hurry that the potency should be carried to actuality. Having insisted that the ideal is nothing until it be embodied in the will and energy of the individual, he turns savagely upon the individual for venturing to take him at his word. Having spent infinite labour on proving that the real is the rational, he is ready to shoot any one who strives to hasten the day when the rational shall be the real.

Thus, if the one thinker is too ready to forget the material element, the other is no less ready to make light of the ideal element, in the life of the community. The latter is disposed to lose sight of the ideal in the actual; the former, of the actual in the ideal. But Hegel, at any rate, was aware that the one side of the truth is no less necessary than the other. And, if he failed to carry out the principle to its just consequences, that was due rather to constitutional timidity and faults of temper than to lack of speculative insight. It was, therefore, a comparatively easy task for any man who started from the point reached by the genius of Hegel to correct the practical inconsistencies into which Hegel had allowed himself to be drawn. And it can only be regretted that, in doing this, Mazzini should have overlooked a vital part of what Hegel might have taught him; and that he should have laid himself open to the charge of falling into an error the contrary of that in which Hegel became entangled. In his case, it is doubtless an error rather of omission than of commission. But, none the less, it mars the completeness of the service which he might easily have rendered. And, just as in the practical application of the idea Hegel needs to be corrected by Mazzini, so in its speculative articulation Mazzini needs to be supplemented by Hegel.

There is, however, one point on which Mazzini's statement is of exceptional value. No other writer has marked so explicitly the profound change wrought in the whole being of man's moral and political life by the working of the law of progress. If the moral law were stationary, he argues in effect, the conscience of



each individual would be the inviolable depositary of it; and there would be little, or rather no, need of the voice of the community. But, at the same time, the duties imposed by that law would be purely negative. They would amount to nothing more than the 'shalt not' of the commandment given on Sinai.

In the particular form of Mazzini's argument, as has already been pointed out, there is room for objection. Without the voice of the community, and without progress, even a negative law would be impossible. It would be impossible without the voice of the community; for the individual conscience, stripped of all guidance from without, is unable, as Mazzini himself elsewhere admits, to discover more than the blank form of the law; the specification is due to the joint action of the community. It would be impossible without progress; for even the most rudimentary beginnings of law are dependent on the existence of society; and that, in its turn, is the most astonishing instance of progress in the whole history of man. It is the most astonishing in itself. It is yet more astonishing, when we consider that it carries in itself the germs of all the subsequent advances it was in man's destiny to make.

Hence it appears that Mazzini has understated the force of his own argument. What he should have said is that, without corporate life and without the progress which that life both presupposes and carries with it, not only no 'positive' law, but no law of any kind, would be either possible or conceivable. As, *ex hypothesi*, man would be without political life, so, by a consequence not foreseen but none the less inevitable, he would also be without moral life. As, *ex hypothesi*, he would be without progress, so even the germs of moral instinct which the individual carries in him would speedily dwindle or be trampled into nothing.

On this point, then, Mazzini may have faltered. But, on the whole, no writer has seen more clearly that the moral life of man is inseparably bound up with membership of the community. None has seen more clearly that progress, without haste but without rest, is of the essence of both. Of the manner in which the law of progress actually fulfils itself—of the relation between individual passion and the overruling movement of ideal forces, involved in that fulfilment—his account, as we have seen, is less complete than Hegel's. But that ideal forces do not operate solely of themselves—that they too, like the more material forces, need to take body in the will of individual agents—this was a truth obscured by Hegel and discerned with incomparable, if too exclusive, clearness by Mazzini.

The same is true of the relation between politics and morals. Kant, making explicit a distinction which from Locke onwards had been implicitly assumed, had laid it down as a fixed principle

that the region of politics was absolutely marked off from that of morals. The former was the region of Right, the latter that of Duty. And Fichte, in his earlier writings, had sharpened the distinction still further. In his later writings he, no doubt, abandoned what he had once declared to be the first condition of all clear thinking in this matter. But he did so with no acknowledgment, it may be with no perception, of what he was about. Hegel was, in fact, the first to start without any presuppositions on the subject. And even his argument fails of being absolutely explicit; fails also, it may be added, in yet more serious respects. In the first place, he does not take sufficient pains to make clear that the separation of politics from morals, so long regarded as the cardinal point of all political theory, had ceased to have any meaning for him. Again his constant disparagement of 'morality,' though it must be remembered that he used the term in a narrower sense than that which it generally bears, laid him open to the charge of not realising one of the two main factors in the problem; and consequently of merely reversing the error in which Kant and Fichte had become entangled. It was small wonder, it might be objected, that the distinction between the two spheres should be obliterated by the man who denied to one of them all title to a separate existence. Lastly, by laying exclusive stress on the power of social forces, of progress as an abstract law, to overrule the more selfish and material energies of the individual—by ignoring the part which may fairly be claimed for his more unselfish and spiritual energies in the direction of those forces and the moulding of that law—Hegel may be said once more to have depreciated the distinctively moral side of human action, the side on which man consciously strives to realise a corporate ideal; and, consequently, to have obscured the issue raised by his predecessors and—apart from these hesitations—answered by him in a sense entirely different from theirs.

Now, on this particular issue, it must be admitted that Mazzini spoke with no uncertain sound. Alike from his illustrations and his more general statements, it is abundantly clear that he repudiates all distinction of kind between morals and politics; that he regards the latter as essentially a reproduction in large of the former; that, as the one is concerned with the realisation of the highest social ideal in the heart of the individual, so the other, in his view, aims at deepening and widening the existing ideal of the community through the unceasing efforts of the individual. The true significance and enduring value of political life lies in the guidance which it, and it alone, can offer to the moral life, and the depth which it, and it alone, can give to the moral sympathies of the individual. The true meaning of the moral life of the individual lies in the degree of completeness with which it holds and strengthens

the bond between itself and the community. That bond cannot be maintained at all unless the individual co-operate in the life of the community. It cannot be worthily maintained unless, so far as the powers of the individual extend, that co-operation amount to the identification of his own life with that of the community. In the life of the nation, Mazzini would have said, no end is worth striving for which does not bear, either directly or indirectly, upon the life—material, moral or spiritual—of the individuals who compose it. And, conversely, in the life of the individual no end is worth striving for which does not, directly or indirectly, go either to maintain or to strengthen the corporate life of the community at large. The political and the moral life of man are absolutely inseparable. The attempt to divorce the one from the other has ended in the starvation and disfigurement of both.

In the application of these principles there is doubtless room for some divergence of opinion. And here again the ideal side of Mazzini's genius comes out. What place, we ask, does he assign to the more material, what to the spiritual and moral elements of national life? The question obviously has a twofold bearing. It affects the internal being of the nation; it affects also its dealings with other States. In the former case, Mazzini is the last man to disparage material prosperity. With all sane thinkers, he insists that a full measure of it is essential to the health of every community. But he also insists that the moral and spiritual side of a nation's life is the higher side; and that the nation which reverses the true order, and aims first at material well-being, is doomed, by an inexorable law, to fail in attaining even that. The same conviction appears in all that he says of foreign policy.

In determining what is, and what is not, to be reckoned as strengthening the outward life of the community, he is in no way influenced by those dreams of foreign conquest or colonial expansion which have done so much to disturb the balance of the older States of Europe and, in later years, of Italy herself. His policy for Italy was not one of foreign expansion, but of free alliance with other struggling nationalities, in particular with Poland and other Slavonic races to the south-east. From wars, necessary to win or maintain the freedom of these nationalities, he by no means shrank. But no war and no other sacrifice on their behalf could justify itself to him, unless it were made solely with unselfish views and without any lurking desire for the aggrandisement of Italy. Such alliances, no doubt, were regarded by him as strengthening Italy in the face of Austria and other hostile States upon her borders; and he made no secret of proposing them largely from that motive. The motive was entirely legiti-

mate. In the circumstances contemplated by Mazzini, alliances of some sort were an absolute necessity to Italy; and the only question was of what sort those alliances were to be. It is in his choice of them that the real mind of Mazzini is revealed. For that choice is determined not by considerations of material advantage, still less by hope of territorial aggrandisement, but by devotion to the principle of nationality; in other words, by what Mazzini regarded as duty to humanity. Thus the purely material side of national life falls into the background. The very external policy of the nation, which is commonly devoted to purely selfish ends, becomes in Mazzini's hands the exponent of a moral or spiritual idea. Nationality with him is no exclusive principle. It is purely defensive in its methods; and its aim is to unite many nations for the protection of the progressive, as against the retrograde, elements of humanity at large.<sup>1</sup>

And this brings us to what has always been recognised as one of the most distinctive features of Mazzini's political theory. That is his conception of nationality. Nationality is to him the connecting link between the individual and humanity. It is the appointed means by which the individual is lifted out of himself to a sense of brotherhood with mankind. Association, corporate life, is essential to the development of man's higher nature; and the only perfect corporate life would be that which embraced the whole of humanity in its scope. That alone, from the nature of the case, would be all-inclusive. That alone would exclude the possibility of conflict from the corporate life of the world. This, however, is a dream which, in all probability, can never be made real. And the only way in which it can even partially be realised is to limit the area of union in such a manner that, within that narrow circle, the sense of corporate life may be quickened to the highest possible degree. The nation is necessary not, as some would seem now to suppose, for a bulwark against humanity; but as a nucleus for that sense of brotherhood which finds its full utterance only when centred in humanity, but which, if humanity were its sole object, would, under present conditions, inevitably lose itself in the sands. It is necessary not as a preventive against brotherhood; but as the best, though necessarily imperfect, channel through which, as the world is at present framed, the sense of brotherhood can be brought home to the generality of men.

Not that Mazzini supposes this either to be now, or to have been in the past, that which has made the spirit of nationality so great a power upon the minds of men. No man could have

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, *Politica internazionale; Opere*, xvi. pp. 128-156 (1871).

been more keenly aware than he was that it has come to be a spontaneous instinct in the soul of man and that this is the true secret of its strength. What he does believe is that, behind every instinct, there is always something rational at work; that there is no instinct which does not serve some intelligent and intelligible purpose; and that, in this case, the purpose served is to foster that corporate life, that sense of brotherhood, which is essential to the individual, no less than to the collective, energies of man.

Thus Mazzini does not view this spontaneous instinct merely as a fact, a thing to be accepted whether we are prepared to approve it or no. It comes to us with the immemorial sanction of the past. It comes, that is, with exactly the same sanction as all the other elements of man's moral and social activity; no more, but also no less. There is the same reason for accepting nationality that there is for accepting the family; there is the same reason for welcoming the bond of citizenship that there is for welcoming that of neighbourhood or humanity. If men have been found to reject the element of nationality, they have also been found to reject that of humanity or the family. If there are dangers in the exclusive cult of the one, there are also, and no less, dangers in exclusive devotion to either of the others. In all these cases it is the task of man to take what he has got; to guard, so far as may be, against the evils inherent in it; and to rest assured that, with wisdom and courage, there is no evil which may not be averted or even turned into a good.

That it is an instinct, is doubtless the first warrant for the acceptance of nationality. But that it is not merely a brute instinct; that, like all other instincts of man, it holds within itself the germ of higher possibilities; that it serves a purpose in the circle of man's activities which nothing else could adequately fulfil—this is the further truth which Mazzini sets himself to prove; and, in proving this, he in no way lays himself open to the charge of forgetting the foundation on which his former argument is built. Nor is there even any hint that he regarded nationality as a passing phase of man's experience, as a thing destined, sooner or later, to give place to the broader area of humanity. On the contrary, he consistently treats it as a providential ordinance; as an instinct planted in the heart of man by God himself, enforced at every turn by physical barriers which no wit of man can overthrow, and strengthened, doubtless in a less degree, by identities and differences of language which it is barely possible for human power to do away.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Humanity is a great army, moving, in the face of powerful and wary foes, to the conquest of lands unknown. The peoples are the various corps,

Granted, then, that nationality is a permanent force not only in the outward history, but in the spiritual growth, of man. Granted, also, that it is a force peculiarly liable to misdirection. What, it may be asked, is its peculiar function in the economy of the world? What is it which, if we could suppose nationality to be eliminated, would, humanly speaking, be lost to the general life of mankind? Mazzini is ready with his answer. And once more, as in the case of Hegel, that answer turns on a definite conception of the relation between the part and the whole, between the particular and the universal.

As the individual forms, within certain limitations, a unit in the life of the nation, so, again within certain limitations, does the nation form a unit in the life of humanity. The individuality of the nation does not, any more than that of the individual, cause it to be absolutely self-contained; does not enable it to act as though it were a law unto itself; does not prevent it from being also a member—nor, as such, from being limited by all the consequences of membership—in a larger whole. The life of the nation, taken even at its lowest power, is controlled largely by its inevitable relation to surrounding peoples, by the wider life of humanity at large. And the more keenly the individual nation realises its capabilities, the more zealously it fulfils the task marked out for it by its distinctive genius, the more completely is this the case. The strong nation is not that which isolates itself, but that which gathers life from many sides and stamps all that it gathers with the seal of its own individuality.

Now turn to the other side of the question. The nation, as an individual unit, is not merely a member of a larger whole. Its individuality is not lost in its relation to the wider world of humanity; or, if we may take the narrower area, to the civilised races of mankind. It is itself a nucleus of separate activities; all of which, in spite of their determination by yet wider influences and yet more comprehensive laws, combine to form an individual existence, acting within and apart from that of which it, in turn, is but a single member out of many. Each nation lives its own life. Nothing can be drawn from the wider life of humanity which is not, consciously or unconsciously, assimilated to that narrower and intenser life, and absorbed in it. It is only through

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the divisions, of this army. Each has a position entrusted to it, each a particular operation to execute; and the common victory depends on the precision with which the different operations are carried out. Do not disturb the order of the battle. Do not forsake the banner given you by God' (*Duties of Man: Op.* xviii. p. 61; *Writings*, iv. 277; E. A. V., 315; Dent, 55; and the whole of chapter v.).

that narrower life that any fragment or element of the wider one can become operative and effectual.

The truth is that humanity, or even the civilised portion of humanity, forms a whole or unit in a vaguer and looser sense than the individual or the nation. A mere aggregate, indeed, it is not. For not only is the fundamental groundwork of man's nature everywhere the same. But, at least within the area of civilisation, there are common laws at work modifying those fundamental qualities, giving them perpetually new shape, substance and direction, along parallel lines, under mutual influences and towards a common goal. Yet the organisation is manifestly much less perfect, much less closely knit, than it is in the case of the individual or the nation. There are comparatively few purposes, of the definite and palpable sort, for which humanity, or even the civilised fraction of humanity, can combine. And even in the region of the more indefinite and impalpable energies—the endeavour after advance in things intellectual and moral—though the purpose may be the same, though the law of development may be intrinsically one, it is attempted by roads so different, it is realised under modifications so endless, that it is hard to say whether the result in any given case owes more to the common groundwork, to the working of common laws and kindred influences, or to the particular genius of individual nations. That humanity—that, at any rate, the civilised part of humanity—is a whole, may not be doubted. But it is a whole still in process of becoming. The nation, so far as its organic structure goes, is a whole already in being.

Thus, as the individual stands to the nation, so the nation, in its turn, stands to humanity. In each case, the smaller unit, though itself an organised and partly independent whole, is at the same time member of a whole larger and more comprehensive than itself. In each case the smaller unit is profoundly modified by membership of that larger body. In each case it retains its individuality, its power of originating action, its capacity to transmute all that it receives into its own life, to transmute all that is given it to its own purposes. In the case of the nation, however, the membership, as we have seen, is of a far looser kind than in the case of the individual. The whole, of which it is a part, is organised less highly; and consequently the influences by which it is moulded are less compulsive than those by which it, in turn, moulds the life of the individual. The 'universal kingdom'—civilised mankind—is a more shadowy conception than the nations—the 'municipal corporations,' as Burke called them—of which it is composed.

These principles, in their double bearing, would probably now

be admitted by almost all; by all, possibly, except the most fervent disciples of Comte. But it is the merit of Mazzini to have given them the clearest statement which they have yet received; to have realised their consequences more fully than any other writer; and to have adapted them on the one hand to the deepest results of modern thought, and on the other hand to the instinctive tendencies of modern political life.

For good or for evil, the principle of nationality has played a larger part in the affairs of Europe during the nineteenth century than at any other period of recorded history. Mazzini, as all the world knows, threw himself heart and soul into the cause of nationality, and did more than any other single man to carry it to victory. In his speculative writings he comes forward, so to speak, to justify his action; to give reason for the faith that is in him. What, he asks, are the tangible benefits conferred by nationality? What is its contribution to the general service of mankind? Each nation, in his answer, has not only an individual life, but a distinctive temper and, in favoured cases, a peculiar genius of its own. It is only by maintaining a separate existence that this distinctive temper and genius can be kept alive. Destroy the nation, as a nation, and history has shown that the talents and capacities, which constitute the mind of the nation, become distorted, dwindle and eventually die away. This is true even of those faculties which, at first sight, seem least dependent upon political conditions; the faculties of intellect and imagination. It is still more true of the faculties of action. It is impossible that men should retain their spontaneity unimpaired unless, in the fullest possible sense, they also retain their independence. Civil freedom is not enough; even political freedom is not enough. Both alike are imperfect, in most cases illusory, unless they rest on national independence. How far the maintenance of separate nationalities can be rightly carried is a question to be decided, in each case, upon its merits. The determining grounds will be partly physical conformation; partly historical tradition; partly the strength of cohesion and resistance to be found in the given nation, the amount of energy and wisdom which it is able to throw into the management of its affairs. What is certain is that, at most periods of history and at none more than the present, the tendency has been to wipe out the smaller nationalities ruthlessly and recklessly, under pretexts which too often have been transparently unsound. And history is full of the waste caused by deeds thus high-handed and unjust. Had this not been so, the life of humanity would, in all probability, have been keener, fuller, more varied than it is.

Thus, accepted in the first instance as a blind instinct, nation-



ality, like other instincts, is found to carry within it its own justification. On the one hand, it is a potent instrument—the most potent ever created—for ennobling the life of the individual. It draws him out of himself, it lifts him above himself. On the other hand, it enriches humanity beyond all power of calculation. It multiplies the types of human energy and insight. It touches the corporate life of man to issues finer, wider, more manifold, than would otherwise be possible. It is not only the appointed means by which the individual establishes his membership in humanity. It is also the articulate organism—one, yet diverse—through which humanity takes concrete shape in the field of history. It is therefore doubly sacred. Sacred, as an instinct which finds a place in every heart. Sacred, as a principle which has ennobled the individual and enriched humanity in the past and will continue to make them richer and nobler in the far future.

The individual, the nation, humanity—these form the permanent elements (what Comte would have called the ‘statical conditions’) in Mazzini’s conception of man’s social life. And the part of each is defined by him, on the whole, with more precision, as well as with more insight, than by any other writers. He does not exalt the individual at the expense of the nation, like the disciples of Rousseau; nor the nation at the expense of the individual, as was the tendency of Hegel; nor humanity at the expense of both, as was the incurable aberration of Comte. Recognising that each of these has its peculiar function, he recognises no less fully that no one of them can put forth its energies without the others; that each of them is conditioned absolutely by the others; and that only to the most limited extent is it possible to mark off the sphere in which each operates even in partial independence of the others.

From this it follows that, in Mazzini’s conception, it is only by an effort of abstraction—and consequently by a process which avowedly does not tally with the facts—that we can speak of ‘statical’ conditions in connection with the corporate life of man. It is the essence of that life to be a dynamic—or, to take a less inadequate metaphor, an organic—process. It is only by action of the whole, by interaction between the several parts, that it has any existence whatsoever. The abstraction by which we speak of statical conditions may have its use. It may enable us to analyse more clearly than would otherwise be possible the working of that vital process which yet, for the moment, it compels us to suspend. But, if we forget that it is merely an abstraction, our whole vision is immediately distorted. And it is largely because he never loses sight of this truth that the foundations of Mazzini

are so firmly laid, and the conclusions he builds upon them so impregnable.

To say, however, that the corporate life of man is a dynamic, or even an organic, process is not enough. It is a process guided by a determinate law of progress; a progress whose successive stages it is impossible to predict, but which can be traced with sufficient clearness through the records of the past. Here again Mazzini stands at a clear advantage over all other writers, with the exception of Hegel. Besides Hegel it is, in fact, only Comte who comes into the comparison. And Comte, as we have seen, while acknowledging progress in words, strips it of all meaning in the application. He enslaves the individual, who is the chief source of progress. Through the caprice of his analysis, he misreads the progress of the past. Nor, even on his own showing, are the facts of the past in any sense the foundation of his liberal prophecies for the future. His polity remains a mere Utopia; of little value for the light it professes to throw upon the past; of still less value for any guidance it offers to the needs and action of the present.

As between Mazzini and Hegel it is less easy to hold the balance; nor perhaps is there any necessity for doing so. Each of them gives weight to considerations which are either neglected or slurred over by the other. Both alike start from the conviction that the corporate life of man is an organic process. Both alike strive to work out this conception to its last consequences in detail. But, while Hegel lays greater stress upon the instinctive and unconscious energy of the vital principle which sustains the whole, Mazzini is more concerned to insist upon the conscious efforts of the individual. While Hegel trusts more to the spontaneous vitality of the idea, Mazzini prefers to dwell upon the necessity for unflinching thought and devotion on the part of the individual agent. Both alike are convinced that the essence of the corporate life lies in progress; that it is never in being, always in becoming. But, whereas Hegel tends to disparage the influence of individual endeavour upon the general result, Mazzini is apt to speak as if, when rightly directed, that endeavour of necessity entered, as an element unaltered and unalterable, into the corporate life of the whole. If Mazzini gives too much weight to the 'passion for reforming the world' which has inspired the noblest efforts of the individual soul, Hegel, beyond all question, gives too little.

Thus, while on particular points each serves to correct or complete the other, on the main issues both writers are fundamentally at one. Mazzini, no less than Hegel, refuses to divorce the individual from the community. Hegel, no less than Mazzini, maintains that the corporate life of the community is inconceivable

apart from progress. Neither writer—Mazzini still less than Hegel—annihilates the individual in the community, as was the initial and fatal mistake of Comte. Both writers, therefore—Mazzini still more than Hegel—secure the condition, so lamentably disregarded by Comte and in a less degree by Burke, under which alone it is possible to attain, or even to conceive of, progress. Neither writer is content to abide by a merely abstract statement of the ideas essential to corporate life. Both writers work out these ideas in concrete detail. Both writers—each in his own way; each, doubtless, with his own special limitations—grasp firmly the practical conditions through which alone it is possible to realise them.

In Mazzini's conception of progress there is, however, one point which seems hardly to have received sufficient notice; and it is one which brings him, at least in appearance, into somewhat sharp conflict with Hegel. That is his account of the manner in which each stage of man's advance is historically connected with that which has gone before. To Hegel, whose eye was naturally fixed on the advance of purely speculative thought, it seemed that the function of reason was rather to follow such changes than precede them; rather to register them when completed—when about, therefore, to give place to some further change—than to prompt them or, in any sense, to pave the way for their practical acceptance. Mazzini, on the other hand, whose interest in the purely speculative side of thought is inevitably less keen, and whose main concern is with its practical effects, insists with unanswerable truth that all action is the result of thought; that the function of reason is not to register the changes of the past, but to point the way to the progress of the future; and that the work of reason must already have been accomplished in the closet before it proclaims itself through action in the streets.

Contrast the two following passages: the first from the Preface to Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie*, the second from Mazzini's *Faith and the Future*.

'As for teaching what the world ought to be,' writes Hegel, 'Philosophy comes too late for that. As the *Thought* of the world, she does not appear in time until the actual has accomplished its work of construction, and has completed itself. This, which is the teaching of Philosophy, is also shown by History. It is only when the actual has come to maturity that the ideal appears to confront it, grasps the real world in its very substance, and builds it again in the shape of a kingdom of thought. When Philosophy thus paints her grey in grey, then we may be sure that a given form of life has grown old; that no grey in grey can renew its youth or do more than present it to us for recognition. The

owl of Minerva does not begin her flight until the twilight sets in.' <sup>1</sup>

Very different is the statement of Mazzini. 'This is the law of progress. One task is succeeded by another task; one synthesis by another synthesis. The synthesis for the time being rules the task of each given epoch, and determines the method and order in which it is carried out. It comprises all the terms achieved by previous syntheses, *plus* the new term which becomes the end of all man's efforts, the unknown which has to be reduced to the known. Analysis also lends its aid, but always draws from the synthesis of the epoch its program and its point of departure. Analysis, in fact, never lives a life of its own. Its existence is purely objective; its purpose, mission and principles are drawn from a source outside itself. A part of every epoch, it is the distinguishing badge of none. To divide the epochs of thought into organic and critical is to falsify history. Every epoch is essentially synthetic; every epoch is organic. The progressive evolution of thought, manifested visibly in our world, accomplishes itself by a continuous expansion. The chain can never be broken. The various ends are inseparably intertwined. The cradle is linked to the tomb.

'Thus, hardly had the French Revolution summed up an epoch, when the first dawn of another epoch showed itself on the horizon. Hardly had the *individual*, with his charter of *Rights*, proclaimed his triumph, when the reason of man presented another charter, that of *principles*. Hardly was the unknown of the so-called Middle Ages disengaged, and the great purpose of the Christian synthesis accomplished, when another unknown appeared to confront the present generation, another end was presented to their efforts.'

'I foresee the objection,' he adds in a note: "The conquest of individual Rights is an illusion. Slavery, inequality, continue everywhere in spite of it. The conflict was hardly even begun by the French Revolution. The individual still controls every question. And, while you speak of a new epoch, vain prayers are being raised on every side that the synthesis, which you declare to be exhausted, may be achieved and translated into fact."

'The answer is this: We must not confound the discovery of a term of progress with its triumph in actual fact; the ideal evolution of an epoch with its material applications; the conquest of a truth with its practical consequences. The *positive* application of a given term to the various parts of the political organism—economic, social and civil—cannot be effectually begun until its moral development, its development in the sphere of reason, is completed. It is the moral development which constitutes the task of a given epoch. And hardly is it completed, when a power,

<sup>1</sup> *Rechtsphilosophie*, p. 20.

whether it be an individual or a nation, combines the results and proclaims the formula, which sums them up, to the world. By that time a new Epoch has opened. And in this new Epoch, while the reason of man is employing itself on the term newly revealed, there is also being gradually wrought out the practical application of the term of the Epoch which is now spent or dying. The thought of one Epoch cannot be verified until the gaze of man is already fixed on the thought of the Epoch which succeeds. Were this not so, the bond which unites Epochs would be broken. We should have that which is called solution of continuity.' <sup>1</sup>

It is clear from the above passage that Mazzini exactly reverses the order established by Hegel; that he places the work of reason not after, but before, the practical endeavour of a given epoch; that he conceives of the latter as entirely dependent upon the former; in other words, that the function he assigns to reason in this matter is not critical but creative. It is, however, equally clear that the contradiction between him and Hegel is more apparent than real; and that the two men are, in fact, speaking of two entirely different things. Mazzini speaks of the constructive work of reason; a work carried out, for the most part, not by speculative philosophers, but by men—moralists, religious reformers, men of letters and the like—who move rather on the secondary, than the primary, plane of thought; a work which must inevitably precede—or, to speak more correctly, coincide with—any creative effort on the part of man. Hegel, on the other hand, speaks of the purely speculative work of reason; that in which it is concerned not to forecast and direct the efforts of the moment or the near future, but to interpret and retrace, step by step, the movement of the past. A contradiction would be established only if it could be proved that either writer was disposed to deny that which is asserted by the other. And this, assuredly, it is not possible to do. Mazzini would not deny that it has often been the task of philosophy to interpret—or, to use his own phrase, to 'find the formula' of—a movement which has already spent its force and is now ripe for displacement by another. Nor would he deny that, by so doing, it may even perform a valuable service to the world of action; that, by presenting the issue in its most abstract and trenchant form, it may clear the minds of men and sharpen their courage for a fresh effort of creative energy. Such, it may fairly be said, was the work of Plato and Aristotle at the close of the Greek world; of Dante, in the long death-struggle of medieval thought; of Rousseau and Kant for the period of transition which opened with the Reformation and closed with the French Revolution; of Hegel

<sup>1</sup> *Faith and the Future: Opere*, v. pp. 161-3; *Writings*, iii. 103-5; Okey, 55 and 93-4; Dent, 162 and 188-9.

himself, in a yet wider sense, as the interpreter and historian of the extinct thought and buried purposes of all previous generations. Hegel, in his turn, would not deny—on the contrary, in all his work he strenuously asserts—that every activity of man has its source in reason; that the function of reason is not only to re-create the life of the past, but to create that of the present and the future; and that the chief, or only, difference between these, the two main operations of reason, is that, while in the former her work is conscious and analytic, in the latter it is unconscious and synthetic. The name of Philosophy, indeed, he confines to the former; but under the name of Spirit he gives full recognition to the latter. So far from being a mere accident or episode, this—the twofold function of reason—is, in truth, the fundamental thought of all Hegel's work, and, in particular, of the earliest and one of the most deep-reaching of all his writings, the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

But, if there is no contradiction between Mazzini and Hegel on this point, it remains true that there is a considerable divergence of temper. In dealing with the creative work of reason, Hegel closes his eyes to all that is not unconscious—it would hardly be unfair to say, automatic—in its operation. Mazzini, on the other hand, sees little but what is the conscious and calculated effort of a given individual. To the speculative and retrospective work of reason, in the same way, Hegel gives an importance which it altogether lacks in the conception of Mazzini. It is the same contrast which runs through the whole thought of the two writers. Here, as elsewhere, it is the dialectic movement of reason, as a force independent of the individual mind, on which stress is laid by Hegel; it is the will and insight of the individual which alone seems of value to Mazzini. To Mazzini, reason is, above all things, the spring of action, the source of all that gives dignity to the corporate activities of man. To Hegel, it is a power which ends in itself, an energy to be prized in and for itself.

So much for the immediate point at issue between Hegel and Mazzini. In the passage quoted from the latter there is, however, much that is not covered by that issue and is yet significant for its bearing upon his general conception of progress. No writer, it is probable, has seen more clearly than Mazzini that progress, if it is to mean anything, must be continuous. With the exception of Hegel, none has seen it so clearly. The foregoing gives a twofold illustration of this.

In the first place, Mazzini explicitly rejects the theory, due originally to Saint Simon, which divides history into organic and critical epochs. Such a theory, he rightly holds, is neither consistent with itself nor in accordance with the facts.

It falsifies the facts; because there is no period of which it

cannot be demonstrated that a positive movement was working side by side with the negative tendencies of the age; and that it was, in fact, the more significant and the more vital of the two. Take, for instance, the early centuries of the Christian era. Take the centuries, so sharply denounced by Comte, which immediately followed the break-up of medieval Christendom. To the outward observer, the former was an age of sheer disintegration. It saw the classical idea of liberty trampled under foot. It saw the gradual dissolution of that universal empire which had offered itself as a gilded equivalent for all that the old order had held dear. But it also saw the disappearance of the tribal system which was only another name for stagnation and continual war. It saw the civil liberties of the individual accepted for the first time in theory, and worked out for the first time in detail. It saw, which was yet more important, the birth and growth of the religion which was to breathe new life into the world. So also with the latter period. It is a delusion, as Mazzini insisted, to find in the Reformation nothing more than a negative movement. The Reformers, no doubt, 'protested' against the Papacy; and so far—but with good reason—their work was negative and destructive. But their protest was made in favour of a constructive idea—the idea of individual liberty—which was the essence of the Christian faith and which the Papacy, by attempting to combine it with an ecclesiastical system essentially tyrannical in its nature, had violently distorted. Thus the vital principle of their endeavours was not critical but organic. The true meaning of their protest and of all that resulted from it was not to pull down that which others had built up, but to carry it to completion; not to emasculate Christianity, but to clear the ground for that free growth of it which the Papacy had arrested; in one word, not to destroy but to fulfil.<sup>1</sup> And the same might be readily shown

<sup>1</sup> 'It is a mistake to base our mode of considering the work of moral emancipation achieved by the Reformation on the accident of that protest against the Diet of Spires which was the origin of the term Protestantism. Protestantism was not, as the Neo-Christians affirm, a negation, a work of criticism relative to the epoch; it was an affirmative Christian product, a solemn manifestation of the *individual*, the intent of Christianity. It *protested*, no doubt; but only against the Papacy, which, *willing* what was beyond its *power*, and attempting to found with an *individual* instrument a *social* unity, was inevitably bound to degenerate into tyranny and to place itself outside the Christian synthesis which, before it had attained a complete development, said to man, *Be free*. Protestantism, therefore, is a protest not *against* the synthesis of its epoch, but in *favour* of that synthesis, which the Papacy, impotent to realise a sublime instinct of the future, destroyed instead of developing' (*Faith and the Future: Opere*, v. p. 158; *Writings*, iii. 99; Okey, 92; Dent, 188).

—as it is, in fact, shown by Hegel—of all other periods in man's history. What is true of the crucial instances taken by Mazzini is equally true of all. Between the negative and the positive, between the critical and the organic, the distinction is not of periods but of functions. In every period the negative tendency is present, but its work is secondary and dependent. In every period the organic spirit is abroad. It is the life and soul of every epoch. It supplies the matter without which criticism itself would be impossible.

To suppose the contrary is not merely to falsify the facts. It is to reduce the very theory of progress to absurdity. To conceive of progress as an alternation of constructive and of critical movements, as a matter of fits and starts, is indeed one degree less unsatisfactory than to represent it as an endless series of circular movements, each ending in the exhaustion of the vital forces with which it set out. But it is very far from being a consistent theory. It entirely fails to account for the periodic renewal of creative energy, which it yet implicitly assumes. It exposes itself therefore, though doubtless in a form less extreme, to the same objection by which the theory of circular motion is decisively overthrown. It represents an advance upon the latter theory, in that it admits progress, as a fact, to be the law of history. It fails, in that for this fact it provides no logical justification; in that it involves a recurring solution of continuity, incompatible with that very idea of progress which it professes to assert. That the negative movement is stronger in some periods than in others, there is no need to deny. But, even in those periods, it will probably be found that what at first sight is taken for a negative movement is, in reality, a positive and constructive movement; which only appears to be negative, because it is directed to an end comparatively narrow and, even when attained, comparatively barren in results. So it was, for instance, with the eighteenth century. This has passed into a by-word for a critical and destructive age. In reality, it brought within the experience of man much that had hitherto lain altogether beyond the range of rational interpretation. By no definition, therefore, can it be described as anything but constructive. But, because its conquests lay for the most part in the lower and less vital region of man's activities—because it dealt with man rather as a being who calculates means to a given end than as one who has power to create for himself his own ends, because it viewed him rather as the creature of circumstances than their master—it is, in popular language, described as pre-eminently a critical age. And, so long as we are aware that we are using the term in a purely popular sense, it would be pedantic to object. But to maintain that Hume and Adam Smith, to maintain even that Voltaire and Gibbon, were in the strict sense purely 'critical' writers, would be the height of un-



reason. Still more preposterous would it be to maintain this of the revivers of poetry and the creators of the novel; of such thinkers as Rousseau, Diderot and Kant.

So far it may be said that Mazzini goes hand in hand with Hegel. Both writers are at one in holding that the work of criticism moves forward, step by step, with that of construction; that every epoch may be described indifferently either as critical or organic. In what follows—in the second point which calls for notice in the foregoing passage—Mazzini may fairly claim to break fresh ground.

It will have been observed that he distinguishes sharply between the 'ideal evolution of the thought of a given epoch' and its 'practical application.' It is only 'when the former is completed that the latter can be effectually begun.' And, by the time that it *has* begun, the ideal movement has already passed into another stage; in the region of ideas, a fresh epoch has already opened. Thus in every epoch there is, so to speak, a double movement. On the one hand there is the purely intellectual movement, at once positive and negative, at once constructive and critical, of abstract thought; the dialectic ebb and flow of the idea. On the other hand there is the 'material' movement, the continuous endeavour to draw the practical consequences—not of the new order, which is silently building itself up in the world of thought, but of the old order which, in that world of thought, has already been superseded by—or rather has been absorbed in—something fuller, deeper and more comprehensive.

It must be at once admitted that the contrast is presented by Mazzini in far too trenchant and absolute a form. It must be granted that he makes no allowance for that influence of the new order upon the detailed articulation of the old, which seems to be demanded in theory and which assuredly can be demonstrated in practice. The two movements may draw their inspiration from different sources; but they do not go on in different worlds. It would be strange indeed if the one did not react upon the other. And, though those who are concerned in elaborating the new order of thought may be comparatively free from such reaction, it is inconceivable that those whose immediate task it is to work out the practical consequences of the old order should not be influenced at every turn by the new lights which have arisen in the firmament of thought. The probability is confirmed by the facts of history. Alike in the French Revolution and in the events of our own time—to take but two instances out of many—it is easy to trace a perpetual conflict between the influence of a purely individualist theory, on the one hand, and of a larger, more organic, theory of national life, upon the other. The one represents the practical application of

the idea elaborated during the period from the Reformation to the Revolution, an idea already worked out in the sphere of theory but not yet fully translated into practice. The other represents the direct working of a theory, even now barely fashioned into complete consistency, as an idea, and consequently, on Mazzini's premisses, by no means ripe for practical application. Yet who shall deny that, tentatively and intermittently, it has been so applied during the last hundred years of European history?

Again, no man who has concerned himself in any degree, however slight, with the history of ideas can fail to be aware that the main difficulty of such a task lies, and must always lie, in separating the different strata of thought which are found embedded in the records of any given generation. Even in the work of a single writer it is often necessary to distinguish between what has been inherited, with more or less of modification, from the past and what springs immediately from the spiritual life of the present. Much more is this the case when we set ourselves to gauge the moral and intellectual tendencies of a whole epoch. Then it becomes still more necessary, and still more difficult, to disentangle that which survives out of the past from that which is born, fresh and vigorous, from the promptings of the present. Yet, according to Mazzini's argument, the latter element has really no right to be there at all. With the exception of two or three abstract thinkers, each generation lives solely on the capital accumulated by the dead labours of the past; and, in its turn, ties up its own wealth, in strictest entail, for the sole enjoyment of the future.

It would not, perhaps, be altogether fair to hold Mazzini down to the bare letter of his statement. And, if we may be permitted to take it loosely, there is much to be learnt from what he says. The mistake he makes is to treat a classification, vague and approximate in its very nature, as a literal and scientific truth. The division of man's mental history into epochs is useful, and indeed indispensable, for practical purposes. But it is not, and cannot pretend to be, a law of nature. It is of service for the guidance of enquiry, and for throwing its results into relief. It becomes misleading as soon as it is taken to imply a hard and fast separation between the ideas and temper of one epoch and the ideas and temper of another. Mazzini's own statement, indeed, offers the surest witness against this delusion. And one can only regret that, having got so far as to insist that the task of one epoch has, in respect of practical application, to wait for its completion in the next, he should not have drawn the further inference that at *all* points the past is inseparably intertwined with the present; that the ideal, as well as the practical, life of man grows not by leaps and bounds, but by a silent impalpable process of modification; and that, in any

strict or scientific sense, it is impossible to make a sharp cleavage between the thought of one period and that which immediately follows.

For, after all, what is the idea which underlies the whole of this and similar passages from Mazzini's writings? It is the continuity of progress. 'Were this not so,' are the closing words cited above,<sup>1</sup> 'the connection between one epoch and another would be broken. We should have what is called solution of continuity.' 'Were it not so,' he repeats in reverting to the same argument but a few months before his death, 'progress would be a matter of leaps and bounds. The reason of man would stagnate during the whole period of practical application. And the practical genius of man, when once the task of that application has been completed, would in its turn remain stagnant until the intellectual evolution of the new idea had been wrought out. The periods of man's progress, interrupted by these periods of stagnation, would, before they could be reunited, stand in need of a new impulse, an initiative given from above. This is the theory of direct, immediate revelations, which we reject as false and contrary to all that we divine of the nature of God.'<sup>2</sup>

It is, then, to secure the continuity of progress that Mazzini draws so sharp a line between the ideal constructions of thought and their practical application; that he parks off the former process into one epoch, and the latter into that immediately succeeding. The end was good. But the means by which he strove to reach it were strangely inappropriate. The effect of his distinction is to perpetuate the very discontinuity which he desires to annul; or rather to make two breaches where, on the theory he denounces, there was at worst but one. The ideal construction is made in one world; the material deductions from it are made in another. And not only are the two divorced from each other; but each is itself subject to violent interruption. Without a pre-established harmony, which nothing short of a miracle could either bring about or maintain, how is it possible that either of them should bring its task to an end at the precise moment when the other is ready to enter on a new phase of its activity? Yet unless this does happen—with an accuracy at least approximate—then, on Mazzini's own showing, a solution of continuity takes place; the hand of Providence must be invoked; and the whole machinery, devised by the philosopher, falls out of gear.

Such criticisms are made in no carping spirit. They are forced on us by the caprice and artificiality of the theory against which they are directed. The thing really does not happen as

<sup>1</sup> P. 309.

<sup>2</sup> *Opere*, xvi. pp. 67-8; Okey, 194-5; Dent, 262.

Mazzini supposes; and, if it did, the difficulties here indicated would assuredly result. The process by which the world of man's collective thought and energy takes shape is a more complex thing than Mazzini makes out. It cannot be brought under rule and system, such as he imposes on its growth. To represent Providence as a merchant, keeping account with mankind on an elaborate plan of double entry, is to suggest an image wanting alike in nobility and in truth. The practical energies of man cannot be divorced in this fashion from his speculative reason. The one controls and modifies the other at every point. And the progress of man consists in the ceaseless correction of the one by the other; of the speculative by the practical, no less than of the practical by the speculative. Little as he may have intended it, the effect of Mazzini's doctrine is to sever the world of action from the world of thought; to empty the latter of reality and the former of all rational content; to banish God from that world of experience where alone, on the philosopher's own principles, he is to be found.

Literally taken, then, Mazzini's account of progress must assuredly be condemned. It defeats the very purpose which it was specially designed to meet. It destroys the continuity of progress. It materialises the political life of man, which it was the whole object of Mazzini to fuse through and through with the ideal.

Yet, interpreted in a larger sense, it bears witness to Mazzini's endeavours after a more adequate theory of progress than had been offered by any man except Hegel; in some points more adequate than what is to be found even in the *Rechtsphilosophie* and the *Philosophie der Geschichte*. If Mazzini is less ready than Hegel to admit the inherent reasonableness of man's practical achievement—to recognise that 'the real is the rational'—he is on the whole more ready to admit that a reasonable result is only attainable by untiring thought and self-sacrifice on the part of the wiser and nobler spirits of mankind; to demand, as Hegel would have said, that the rational shall, so far as in man lies, be made the real. His weakness consists in his comparative failure to see—what was so clearly seen by Hegel—that the unconscious reason of the community is capable of overruling the perversity of the individual; that the self-seeking, the unreason, the lawlessness of the individual has again and again been controlled so as to work the righteousness of the nation or the race. His strength lies in the urgency with which he insists that, humanly speaking, this can only be if justice, unselfishness and reason are for ever vigilant to baffle their opposites and out of their evil still to find means of good.

His weakness, as well as his strength, appears in the above account of progress. What is it that causes him to draw so sharp a line between the speculative work of reason and its practical

application but a distrust of the average intelligence and public spirit of mankind, a desire to shield the higher and rarer faculties of man from all chance of being corrupted by their evil communications? This is the same tendency that we have already noted in his more general conception of progress. It is the tendency of the idealist to put the exceptional before the regular, to 'trample the roots of humanity under foot.' Yet, if Mazzini has the weakness, he has also, and in still greater measure, the strength of the idealist. He may look askance at what the practical reason of man, when left to itself, is capable of achieving. But he has boundless confidence in the same reason, when guided by the speculative insight, the self-sacrificing devotion, of the few. And the main object of the strict diet under which he puts mankind, in respect of progress, is that he may set the practical reason, the activity of the many, in its proper place; that he may exclude it from any voice in determining the course which that progress is to take. He forgets, doubtless, that, if the speculative reason, the wisdom of the few, has much to give, it has also much to take, before it can fix the end of man's endeavours; he forgets that, in these matters, it is impossible to fix the end without continuous reference to the means. He is blind, therefore, to what the practical reason, the unconscious instinct of the many, offers not merely for the choice of means but also for the determination of the end. But he is right in maintaining that it is hopeless to trust only to the instinctive and unconscious promptings of reason; and that the only result of doing so must be to make man's collective life the sport of accident or condemn it altogether to stagnation. The reforming zeal, the love of the idea in and for itself, is a necessary element in all corporate life. And, if Mazzini lays too exclusive a stress on it, if he exalts it too constantly at the expense of the other, this must in fairness be forgiven him, just as the opposite error must be forgiven to Hegel. For if it be true that the speculative reason unchecked by the practical, the conscious unchecked by the instinctive, loses itself in the void, it is no less true that the practical without the speculative, the instinctive without the conscious, is a blind guide and leaves man to grope his way in the dark. It is only when the two elements are left free to act and react upon each other that either of them attains its full power, or that mankind draws all it is capable of drawing from their action. Even then, the guidance offered is fallible enough. But it is all that is open to man. And with less than all he ought not to be content.

Mazzini, as we have seen, explicitly debar the practical reason from all influence upon the speculative; from all voice in fixing the road which mankind, as a divinely commissioned

host, is to pursue. The one task he allows it is to work out the 'material consequences' of an idea which it receives, ready made, from above. Hegel, though less explicitly, shuts out the speculative reason from all effective influence on man's corporate life. The one function he reserves for it is to retrace, in the order of thought, the road which mankind has already traversed in the world of practical activity; to rebuild, in the world of ideas, the fabric which is already crumbling to fragments in the world of realities. Mazzini disregards the influence of the practical reason upon the speculative; Hegel, the influence of the speculative upon the practical. Mazzini sees little in history save the element of progress; Hegel goes far to cut off the springs of progress at their source. Both alike—though on very different grounds, and in very different ways—show a haunting mistrust of what we are accustomed to regard as the democratic spirit. Both alike shrink from giving free play to the whole force, the undivided energies, of man's being.

Neither writer, however, can be supposed to have intended the inference here drawn from his statement. Each betrays the inmost bias of his mind, without wishing it and without knowing it. In each there are other tendencies at work, which it would be absurd not to recognise and which lead in directions very different from those in question throughout the preceding pages. Individual reason—the source from which, if experience count for anything, all progress must take its rise—may be disparaged by Hegel. But it would be ridiculous to deny that he believes in progress; that he insists upon it at every turn; that its action is assumed on every page that he wrote concerning the nature of the idea. So also with Mazzini. He may make light of the instinctive reason, the unreasoning thought, of the community. But, if there is one man who has appealed to the collective faith of men and placed his whole trust in their corporate energy, it is the man who, at the threshold of his life, turned deliberately from the instructed few to the ignorant many, who subordinated the rights of the individual to the duties of humanity, and whose watchword, alike in victory and defeat, was 'God and the People.' And, if he might justly be charged with supposing the bulk of mankind to be more capable of abstruse thought and sustained devotion than is in fact the case, he might with no less justice have answered that he wrote of men as, in his own experience, he had found them. By the contagion of his own faith, by the magnetism of his own devotion to a great ideal, he had worked miracles of faith, and touched unsuspected springs of thought, in others. And he might be pardoned for thinking that what he had done and seen himself must have been done and seen repeatedly

in the past, and would be no less often in the future. And, if faith and devotion like his were indeed the birthright of every generation in the leaders, they would doubtless call out an answering faith and devotion in those who are born to follow. In that case there might be little need—there would certainly be less need—of that other quality—the instinctive reason which blunders to its unknown end through a thousand defeats in detail—the quality on which Hegel counted to carry forward the ceaseless movement of the world. The zeal of the reformer, who sees his way to a determinate end, would find an echo on every side; the multitude would be possessed by a faith as clear-sighted as his own; and, in the fabric created by that faith, future experience, the rough reason of the world, might find little to correct. This, however, is by no means the case. Waves of enthusiasm, such as Mazzini prompted, are rare things in the history of man; and, when they do come, are apt to be borne down by cross currents and to spend their force in directions very different from those to which they pointed at the start. Mazzini himself, before his death, had bitter cause to recognise this. Seldom, indeed, has Right, under the shape it was first proclaimed in, ultimately triumphed. It has been adapted to countless needs, real or supposed, it has been modified in countless ways, before it could win even approximate acceptance from the world at large. And what does this mean but that Hegel is far more nearly right than Mazzini; that, as a matter of fact, the practical reason of the multitude counts for more in the ultimate issue than what is contributed by the speculative genius, or the reforming zeal, of any individual?

We come back, then, to the point from which we started. Neither the account of progress which Mazzini offers, nor that which is given by Hegel, is complete in itself. Each needs to be corrected and supplemented by the other. Both alike start from the corporate life rather than from the individual. Both alike find the essence of that corporate life in continuous progress. Neither of them, however great his zeal for the corporate life, is prepared to seek it through any sacrifice of the intellectual or moral spontaneity of the individual. The first of these convictions separates them from the theorists of individual Right, from the school which dominated Europe till the time of Burke. The second marks their divergence from Burke himself. The third places an impassable barrier between them and Comte.

There remain the differences which part these two thinkers from each other. These, as we have seen, are to be found firstly in the different values they attach respectively to the individual and the social element in the life of the community; secondly, in the differences (largely consequent upon the first) which underlie

what each has to say of progress; lastly, in the far greater importance assigned by Mazzini to the element of nationality.

In his conception of nationality there can be little doubt that Mazzini added a link of the first value to the theory of political philosophy. And that for two reasons. In the first place, on strictly speculative grounds, it is essential to find some middle term between the individual and mankind. It may be objected that this had been done long before Mazzini; that—without going back as far as Burke—it had been done in Hegel's theory of the State. It must be observed, however, that the State is something very different from the Nation; that it is liable to be understood—and is, in fact, too often understood by Hegel—as a more or less artificial creation, as one which does not, of necessity, spring from any largely human instinct nor rest on any natural foundation. And it is only when it does spring from such an instinct, and when it is based on such a foundation—in other words, when the State becomes the Nation—that it can fitly take its place between two things so inseparable from our very conception of man as the individual and humanity. And this brings us to the other reason why Mazzini's insistence on nationality is so important.

It is round nationality that the civic passions of man have largely centred. It is for nationality that the fiercest struggles of history have been fought. To the majority of men the State is little more than nationality puts into it. Before its other functions they remain, if not critical, at least unmoved. That the State stands for justice between man and man; that it represents man's 'permanent reason' as against his 'occasional will'; that it demands a high ideal of corporate life—all this is admitted by the intellect. But what appeals to the heart is the success with which our own nation has asserted itself against others, the degree to which it has made itself feared by others, the persistence and courage which it has shown in the face of others. This may not be, and is not, the noblest view, but experience shows it to be the view most commonly held. It follows that no theory which fails to allow full scope for the sense of nationality, as distinguished from the more abstract conception of the State, can claim really to represent the facts with which it professes to deal. It cannot be said to satisfy either the real needs or the prevailing sentiment of the present. Still less can it be said to interpret the history of the past.

Now it can hardly be doubted that the earliest writer to give its due place to nationality was Mazzini. He felt, as few men have felt, the force of the popular sentiment in this matter. He was alive also to its limitations. To him the nation is not, as it



is to many, an end in itself. It is strictly a link in the chain between the individual on the one side and humanity on the other. He recognises, as no previous writer had done, what may be called the personality of the nation. He proclaims its right, or rather its obligation, both to defend itself against all encroachment, whether material or moral, from without, and to develop its inborn faculties to the highest possible pitch from within. He thus gives satisfaction to all that is either valid or worth having in the claims of nationality. At the same time, he marks out the limits beyond which the instinct of nationality becomes dangerous, or even harmful. He denies that it is a final and absolute principle. He persistently subordinates it to the larger claims of humanity. This at once bars out the possibility of any right to aggression as between one nation and another. It subjects all nations alike to the common ties which bind the members of one brotherhood, mankind. By the same stroke, Mazzini gives the only valid sanction to the real rights of nationality. He declares the free development of the national spirit to be essential to the true life of humanity. So far as it serves that end, it is nothing but good. As soon as it throws itself athwart that end, it becomes an enormous evil.<sup>1</sup>

In nothing, perhaps, is the greatness of Mazzini more apparent than in this. The first explicitly to incorporate nationality with the other elements of political life, he did not suffer himself to be drawn into any one-sided estimate of its claims. He asserted its rights. But at the same time, and on a perfectly rational principle, he laid down their limitations. He claimed enough to justify the movement which it was his mission to initiate in the present; enough also to account for all that can fairly be approved in the history of the past. But, in doing so, he was careful to mark the principle which condemns what is justly to be condemned in the action of the past, and to guard against the

<sup>1</sup> The following passage gives the contrast between the true nationality and the false: 'You have before you great and powerful nations. . . . To what end will they use their power? Will they establish their nationality on the fraternity of the peoples, on the apostolate of Truth, Beauty and Justice? Or, burying themselves in the wretched squabbles of a grasping nationality, and declaring themselves neutral between the two principles which contend for humanity, will they attempt to monopolise liberty while they long or work for the weakness of others? Will they understand that national life and international should be but two manifestations of one sole principle, the love of good? Will they choose for their motto that of reactionary France, *Each for himself*, or that of the France of the People, *The betterment of all through the work of all, the progress of each for the common advantage*?' (*Opere*, vii. p. 284; *Writings*, vi. 114; E. A. V., 184).

abuses which, as experience has but too amply shown, were to dog the steps of nationality in our own day, and probably for a long time yet to come. And his clear-sightedness has its reward. It is because he saw all sides of the question that his work, both as theorist and as man of action, has left so deep a mark; and that his name will go down to all time as the apostle of nationality.

On the other two points, as we have seen, it is less easy to adjust the claims of the two writers. Each overlooks considerations which are clearly realised by the other; each contributes something which is ignored, or lightly regarded, by the other. Hegel is impatient of the part played by conscious reason, by the deliberate efforts of the individual in furtherance of progress. His whole stress is laid on the mysterious power by which, in spite of individual perversity, the idea works out its way to its unseen goal. Mazzini is impatient of the slow march demanded by this unconscious process. He gives less weight to the overruling force of the idea, to the instinctive common sense of the community. He allows far more to the foresight and determination of the individual. It is to preserve this intact that he denies to the community all initiative in the work of progress. It is for the same reason that he draws an arbitrary line between the speculative elaboration of the idea, at each stage of human progress, and its practical application.

Both authors are right in what they affirm. Both are wrong in what they deny or disregard. The affirmation of each is too unqualified; and for the limitations we have to turn to the assertion of the other. The one gives too little to the zeal and foresight of the individual; the other gives too much. The one gives too much to the inherent vitality of the idea; the other gives too little. To determine the exact proportion of truth to be found in the writings of each, on the points where there is difference between them, is impossible. For ascertaining the precise amount contributed by the individual to the common stock, and the precise amount given by the community, no formula has yet been discovered. It is probable that none will ever be. For, as both Mazzini and Hegel insist, the whole of man's corporate life depends on the vital play of these opposite forces; and to define the exact scope of such forces in the moral life of the nation is as impossible as it would be in the physical life of the individual. All we can do is to recognise, to the fullest extent, the presence of each. The rest, in all probability, is for ever beyond our powers.

It is the greatness alike of Mazzini and of Hegel that they do recognise the presence of both elements more fully than any other men have done; that they recognise them not merely as

present, but as interacting vitally upon each other; and consequently that they attain—each in his own way, each under his own limitations—a conception of progress, impossible to those who saw in the political life of man either nothing but the action of the individual, or nothing but the action of the community.

It is the further greatness of Mazzini that, so far from merely laying down these principles in theory, he gave his whole life to carrying them out in practice; and that he left an example of speculative genius devoted to the active service of man such as Europe had not seen since the age of Luther and Calvin.



## INDEX

Numerical References to Volume I. are given in roman type; to Volume II. in *italic* type. The following abbreviations are used throughout :  
 B. = Burke. C. = Comte. F. = Fichte. Heg. = Hegel. Hob. = Hobbes.  
 Hum. = Hume. K. = Kant. L. = Locke. Maz. = Mazzini. Mon. =  
 Montesquieu. R. = Rousseau. S. = Spinoza. V. = Vico.

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